



“Revisiting Conflict Resolution Strategies At Workplace”

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Abstract

Success of any organisation depends on its employees' contribution and efficiency. The efficiency of employees at the workplace highly depends on the healthy environment in which they live and work. The conflicts being the component of interpersonal interaction it is natural to have them at the workplace. The conflict arises in different forms and it is inevitable to have conflicts that involve superior and subordinate or among any of the stakeholders. Conflicts are desirable if they can improve the way of working and organisation dynamics and can increase productivity. Unresolved conflicts may sometimes lead to litigation and may further disturbs the behaviour of people drastically resulting in the hostile environment abusive behaviour by the employees thereby decreasing the efficiency of people at the workplace. Conflict resolution is always a time consuming process but unresolved conflict can lead to serious disasters. The present study discusses the reasons for the conflict and how to manage effectively based on the survey conducted on 23 top level managers of Mumbai and Pune including the top level Chief Peoples Officer of the companies. The study uses the narrative method of data analysis and shows that prolonged and resolved conflict can lead to hostility at the workplace resulting in disorders of the health and the well being of the employees. The study also discusses the strategies that are adopted by the top level managers of the company in conflict management.

Key Words: Conflict resolution, socio-economic, strategies, managers

Conflicts in organisation are inevitable between formal authority in power and the group affected . The disputes arising from the revenue distribution, working hours, peoples performance at workplace, disagreement on jurisdiction, departments, between union and management can all be the sources of the conflicts.

There are other subtler forms of conflicts arising from jealousy, selfishness, vindictiveness, designations, roles, personality and many times power play and bias. Conflict is caused due to competing needs and thought processes that occurs among the parties when they respond to situations in different ways. This can often lead to resolution or sometimes more elevation of conflicts. Conflict among the teams or the work groups can arise from the desire to assume power or to have status and control. These conflicts can also arise due to unequal distribution of resources between the group's in organisation The conflict resolution can be achieved through resolutions, by the process of negotiations and problem solving one can explore different alternatives to the issues and to achieve compromise among the parties through proper communication and negotiations.

Riggio (2003) described conflict into four main types in the organisation the first is intra individual conflict where there is a dilemma situation for a person with 2 options and example can if a star performer is late then whether his late arrival to work is to be ignored or he must be disciplined like any other subordinate.

In 1976 Ruble and Thomas developed a model on conflict behaviour according to which their model manager often has to deal with conflicts in five ways usually while dealing with employees. These models can be used in different situations and managers have different opportunities to use any of these. However all these traits are helpful depending on the situation like in some cases avoidance of some conflicts is necessary, somewhere compromise is required to give weightage to someone's point of view, somewhere we have to accommodate people and sometimes we need to be competitive. This model also includes collaboration as an important trait of conflict resolution.

Robbins (1978) analysed the grouping of conflict philosophies used by managers in three categories namely behaviourist, interactionist and traditionalist. The philosophies usually followed are similar to traditionalist approach but having a non destructive view of the conflict was a behaviourist approach until the conflicts are resolved for the benefit for all involved instead of stimulating it. The third one that is interactionist is completely different from the first two approaches and here the managers see the conflict as a potential for growth and innovation and they purposely stimulate it at lower level as they believe that there lies the real potential of growth and quality improvement.

Robins (1978) believed that conflicts are often change agents and can have positive aspects when dealing with any situation. According to him there are three main categories of condensing the conflict namely structuring a problem, communication and personal behaviour. To successfully stimulate the conflict it is necessary to understand its source. The contingency approach resolves conflict using conflict management styles and problem solving techniques. This approach is used when the employees are under trained or untrained.

Rapport A. Chammah A.M, Orwant C.J. (1965) conducted a series of observations and explored the complex nature of conflict. Thomas K.W. (1992) explored and explained the literature on conflict and its management based on his continuous work since 1976. He edited a book that describes the conflict handling based modes on classical two dimensional taxonomy. Wall J.M., Callister R.R.(1995) illustrated conflict as a social process that usually impacts the behaviour, relationships and organisational structures.

Research Methodology

Research problem

The root of the conflict situation is non agreement between parties involved which is reflected in their difference of opinion or interests. This divergence of interests or opinion highly depends on each party's perception. Conflicts are complex social problems and often pose challenges in the situation. The conflicts therefore have grave social impacts and manifest themselves with socio economic, emotional reaction of the people involved and situation many times become political. In any organisation greater amount of time is wasted in conflict resolution and sometimes the unresolved conflicts can lead to greater degree of losses in the form of low performance and hence less efficiency and hence the economic impact can be detrimental if resolution is not given effect in the long run.

Research Objectives

1. to evaluate the impact of workplace conflict on the performance of employees
2. to gain insight into the strategies that can be used to cope up with conflict at the workplace.
3. to study the significance of social support in conflict resolution.

Methodology

The research was conducted in Mumbai and Pune wherein the personal interaction happened with 23 Human resource managers at the middle level managers of the companies. One Chief human resource officer was also consulted and he was generous enough to share his experiences in overcoming the challenges faced by him in resolving the conflict. The structured questionnaire was prepared and discussion was conducted in the sequence. The data collected was analysed and interpreted using simple qualitative analysis as the data was in the qualitative form. This research used qualitative data analysis relating to assessing the conflict impact and its resolution and the data collection included the interaction with the management personnel at the higher and middle level all of whom have the experience of more than 15 years.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The raw data was analysed using the narrative analysis where in experiences and the information shared by the respondents was analysed and inferences were drawn.

Cause of Conflict -Some of the important reasons for conflicts at workplace were -

- Clashing values
- Lack of honesty Poor Leadership
- Improper goal assignment
- Improper Employee engagement wherein some are highly engaged and some poorly engaged
- Improper team size
- Unmanaged diversity
- Discrimination
- Personality clashes
- leadership conflicts
- Arrogant Bosses
- Inadequate training
- Wrong Placement
- Biassed performance appraisal system
- Warring egos
- Unmanaged conflicts leading to toxic environment
- Jealousy
- Union Interventions
- Cultural Diversity
- Incapable Managers not able to understand the culture and values

Impact on Performance - Some of the consequences highlighted from the survey at the organisational level -

- Quality compromised
- Inability to meet the deadlines
- Increased level of non cooperation among the employees
- Low Morale
- Low team productivity
- Dissatisfied customers
- Chances of losing good employees if conflicts are not managed well
- Increased cost and time of supervision
- Increased cost of training due to stress
- Increased cost of recruitment resulting from excessive employee turnover

Socio economic consequences at employee level- -

- Decreased investment and trade
- Devastation impact on education and healthcare
- Forced displacement
- Deteriorated interpersonal relationship
- Insufficient communication among team mates
- Lack of Cooperation and coordination resulting into more supervision
- Excessive physical and mental stress
- Hinders creativity and innovations
- Impact on health and wellness
- Depression
- Leading to isolation
- Lack of trust and confidence
- Lack of mental peace
- Increased anxiety that needs use of antidepressants

Key Findings - Strategies used by the Managers

Communication and negotiation is an important tool used by 93 % of the respondents to deal with conflict. The respondents felt that the unresolved conflicts lead to feelings of anger and animosity among the people which further results in co-operation and disengaged employees. To break the silence it is always preferred to come to the table. Another important strategy used by the managers was avoidance. 56% respondents said they practise avoidance in the issues already known and that were resulting from conflicting interest. 5% of the respondents strongly felt conflict gets resolved on its own when they do not consider it as conflict and treat everyone at par by not considering their opinion on the matters of conflict and not even talking about it. They further clarified that over a period of time where employees work together then these conflicts are resolved on their own so instead of resolving conflict the proper goal assignment and working in teams is crucial. 21 Managers that is 91.3% felt that leadership has not much control over managing conflicts however it depends on leaders to reduce or inflate these conflicts. It was also felt that conflicts can be constructive if managed to create little competition and controlled when it gets worse through goal reassignment or communications. It was also pointed out by one middle level manager that conflicts are sometimes inflicted purposely from the top authorities as it is a good way to keep employees mentally and emotionally engaged and hence they are not managed fully but only to the extent beneficial for the short term goals realisations

Conclusions and Recommendations

Unresolved conflicts can be dangerous and have proved dangerous for the mental and physical health of the employees. Employees are assigned certain tasks and goals to be accomplished on time and hence the productivity of the employees determines the overall efficiency at the workplace. Conflict management approaches can be diplomatic or direct depending on intention to deploy proactive measures to control or to trigger the turmoil at the workplace. To resolve the issues managers can have clear communication and establish rules sometimes for healthy behaviour of employees towards others and to avoid intimidation and coercion. The proper employee engagement plan is also important to keep them productively engaged in the goals. Mandating mutual dependence of employees on one another for goal or target achievement for their career advancement and performance appraisal can be an important way to leave no space for conflict and can act as a self-resolving measure to address conflict. This can also result in developing interpersonal relationships at the workplace and having enough communications and negotiations in play.

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