

# A Study of Conflicts and Conflict Management Styles in Organizations

Kaamini Rajotia- Assistant Professor LLDIMS

## Abstract

There are conflicts in every organization on a daily basis which are difficult to avoid, but it is possible to look for several ways to manage them. The organization first needs to have a problem-solving approach. It is necessary to continuously track the organizational signals which would always point to the existence of conflict. If we do not react in time, this can lead to the situation that the conflict itself manages the organization. With the help of this paper I would brighten the meaning of conflict on the organization, the conflict process and possible styles of conflict management. I would give a view of the relationship between the level of conflict and its impact on the organizational performance. This paper would also focus on conflict and how much does it influence the successful course of actions of business.

**Keywords:** *conflict, conflict management styles, organizational behaviour, dependent variables.*

## Introduction

A conflict is a clash of interest. The basis of conflict may vary but, it is always a part of society. Conflict in groups often follows a specific course. *Routine group interaction* is first disrupted by an *initial conflict*, often caused by differences of opinion, disagreements between members, or scarcity of resources. Our offices are our first homes as we spend the maximum time at workplaces only. One has to respect his organization to get respect in return. Learn to keep a control on your emotions at workplace. Never fight at the workplace as it spoils the decorum of the office. You might not agree to the other person but that doesn't mean you will start fighting with him. Sit with him and try to find out a solution, Conflicts spoil the ambience of offices and also lead to negativity all around. Always respect other individual's opinion. Nobody wins in a conflict and nothing productive comes out of it. Employees tend to lose their concentration and focus in work if they are engaged in conflicts. Individuals lose interest in their jobs leading to zero output. One should always keep in mind that office is a part of one big family working together towards a common goal.

According to Roloff (1987), "organizational conflict occurs when members engage in activities that are incompatible with those of colleagues within their network, members of other collectivises, or unaffiliated individuals who utilize the services or products of the organization" (p. 496)

Interpersonal conflict –which is the underlying essence of the present research-is considered to be one of the most difficult challenges organizational members face (Phillips and Cheston, 1979) and one of the most frustrating and uncomfortable experiences for managers (Earnest and McCaslin, 1994).

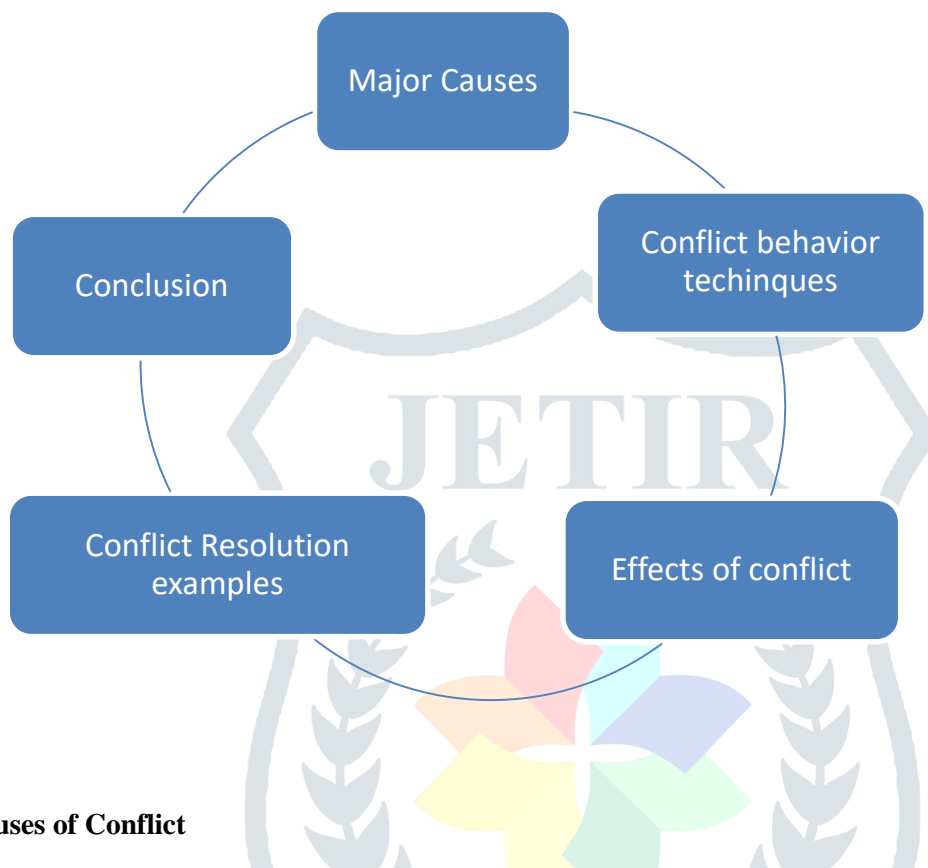
Directing conflict in a positive or negative way may affect the nature of the conflict whether beneficial or destructive (Cetin and Hacifazlioglu, 2004).

The conflicts can be managed through a number of sources. One is the use of some techniques which keep the problem small and containable. A second is the use of a number of detailed procedures and frameworks which makes it easier for a mediator to keep on track. An explicit problem-solving approach is used, which increases many users' acceptance of the method. The third is the inclusion of simple communication skills training (for mediator, or those in conflict, or both) as part of the approach.

That conflict is good because conflict can stimulate innovative thinking when properly managed. Lacking conflicts, thought and action are performed because they are habitual. Conflicts allow an examination of necessity of these thoughts and actions. The third assumption points out that people are frequently timid in facing the reality that legitimated differences may exist and instead blame conflict on poor or non-existent communication. It may seem easier to live with unresolved misunderstanding than to face the fact that real, fundamental differences do exist and so demand recognition and management (Deetz and Stevenson, 1986).

“Conflict does not only come about when values or needs are actually, objectively incompatibles, or when conflict is manifested in action; it exists when one of the parties perceives it to exist”. Folger also sees conflict as coming from interdependent people (Tidwell, 1998).

### Proposed plan of study



### Major causes of Conflict

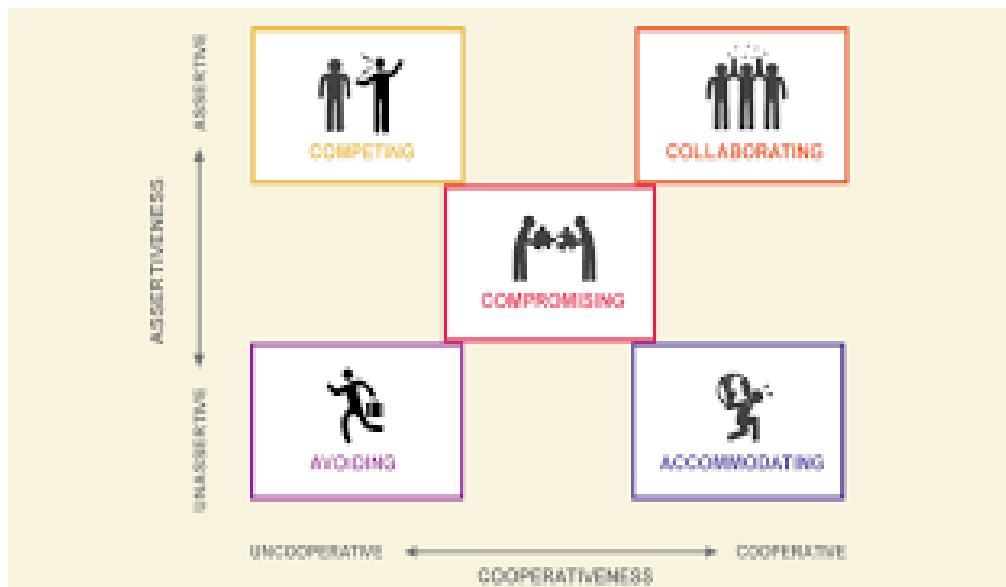
Major causes of conflict in the workplace include:

- **Personality clashes** - the 'personality mix' within a team can be upset when there is a fundamental incompatibility in their personalities, their approaches to things, or their style of life. Individuals may also respond to challenging situations in an unproductive way. Conflicts can rip teams apart, destroy moral and their quality of life. We can't control or change the personality of the other person but we certainly can control our own emotions and change the way we react to the other person.
- **Unrealistic needs and expectations** - conflict at work can often be caused when employers ignore the needs of employees or set unrealistic expectations. For example, you set impossible deadlines? You may ask for unachievable results? Or do you expect employees to complete projects with a limited team, or inadequate budget?

Whilst you may think that setting super-ambitious goals can help your team achieve more than if a much lower target was set, it may in reality have a far-reaching effect on your employees and your overall business success.

- **Business values** - Value conflicts are caused by perceived or actual incompatible belief systems. Most people have very clear ideas about what they think is fair, and the organisation's procedures and policies must reflect this.
- **Increase in workload** - sometimes workplace conflict is caused because people feel they are being pushed too hard and resentment sets in if they feel their workload is unmanageable. A heavy **workload** causes mental and physical stress, leading to poor **performance** and diminished productivity and increase in the employee's workload is predictive of an increase in hostile and argumentative behaviours in the employee's home environment, resulting in family conflict and decreased family stability. These negative effects were found to be especially severe when expectations at work interfered with the employee's ability to fulfil expectations at home.

## Understanding Conflict Behavior Strategies: The Thomas - Kilmann Model



- **Avoiding** - indicates the person who is avoiding is low on the assertiveness scale and is low on the cooperativeness scale. That means that the avoider doesn't take care of his/her needs and doesn't really help the other person either. The avoider would prefer to be somewhere else when conflict occurs.
- **Accommodating** - indicates the person who is accommodating is low on the assertiveness scale and is high on the cooperativeness scale. That means that the accommodator doesn't take care of his/her needs but sacrifices personal needs to cooperate and satisfy the other person.
- **Competing** - indicates the person who is competing is high on the assertiveness scale and is low on the cooperativeness scale. That means that the competitor takes care of his/her needs first. The competitor cares very little for the needs of others, does not try to cooperate, and wants to win.
- **Compromising** - indicates the person who is compromising is at the mid-point on the assertiveness scale and the mid-point on the cooperativeness scale. That means that the compromiser tries to find middle-ground by taking care of his/her needs as well as the needs of others. The compromiser does try to cooperate but not at his/her personal expense.
- **Collaborating** - indicates the person who is collaborating is high on the assertiveness scale and high on the cooperativeness scale. The collaborator takes care of his/her needs as well as the needs of others without compromising, or giving something up. The collaborator tries to understand where the other person is coming from so that a win-win situation is achieved, where neither party loses anything. Collaboration is the best way to manage conflict but it is also the most time-consuming.

### The effects of conflict within an organization

As organizations strive to achieve their goals, they are often met with challenges they must overcome as a team. Challenges leave room for conflict between members, other organizations, communities and other parties involved in the organization's mission. While "conflict" often has a negative connotation, the effects of conflict within an organization can be positive and negative.

### Mental Health Concerns

Conflict within an organization can cause members to become frustrated if they feel as if there's no solution in sight, or if they feel that their opinions go unrecognized by other group members. As a result, members become stressed, which adversely affects their professional and personal lives. Organization members may have problems sleeping, loss

of appetite or overeating, headaches and become unapproachable. In some instances, organization members may avoid meetings to prevent themselves from experiencing stress and stress-related symptoms.

### **Decrease in Productivity**

When an organization spends much of its time dealing with conflict, members take time away from focusing on the core goals they are tasked with achieving. Conflict causes members to focus less on the project at hand and more on gossiping about conflict or venting about frustrations. As a result, organizations can lose money, donors and access to essential resources.

### **Employee Turnover Impacts**

Organization members who are increasingly frustrated with the level of conflict within an organization may decide to end their membership. This is especially detrimental when members are a part of the executive board or heads of committees. Once members begin to leave, the organization has to recruit new members and appoint acting board members. In extreme cases, where several members leave or an executive board steps down, organizations risk dissolution.

### **Conflict Escalation and Violence**

When conflict escalates without mediation, intense situations may arise between organization members. It's unfortunate, but organizational conflicts may cause violence among members, resulting in legal problems for members and possibly the organization.

### **Inspire Creativity to Solve Problems**

Fortunately, some organization members view conflict as an opportunity for finding creative solutions to solve problems. Conflict can inspire members to brainstorm ideas, while examining problems from various perspectives.

### **Share and Respect Opinions**

As organization members work together to solve conflict, they are more willing to share their opinions with the group. Conflict can also cause members to actively listen to each as they work to accomplish the organizations' goals.

### **Improve Future Communication**

Conflict can bring group members together and help them learn more about each other. From learning each others' opinions on topics relevant to the organization's growth to understanding each member's preferred communication style, conflict within an organization can give members the tools necessary to easily solve conflicts in the future.

### **Identify New Members**

Within organizations members actively participate in each meeting, enjoy serving on multiple committees and have an opinion on each topic the group discusses. There are also members who seemingly contribute little to the group and observe more than talk. Conflict within an organization can inspire typically silent members to step up and demonstrate their leadership skills by offering meaningful solutions to the problem the group is facing.

## Conflict Resolution Examples

Every conflict is different, and there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach to solving each one. Each style has its own strengths and weaknesses that make it effective depending on the conflict it's used in. Take a look at these five examples that outline how these conflict resolution styles can be used in real-life situations.

### 1. Accommodating an Angry Customer

Company policy can often be a roadblock to customer success, and it can put employees in a difficult position when dealing with a frustrated customer.

Imagine that you have a long line in your store and at the front is a customer who's demanding your employee to give them a refund. The customer's purchase was made over a year ago which is well past the company's "firm" one-month return policy. As your rep unsuccessfully tries to explain this to the customer, impatient people waiting at the back of the line are starting to return their products and leave the store.

This puts employees in a tricky situation where they need to fulfil both the customer's needs as well as the company's. In these cases, an accommodation approach is the best strategy because it produces a beneficial outcome for all parties involved.

The customer gets a refund, the other customers in line think this is great customer service, and the company doesn't lose any additional sales. Even though you may need to break company policy, rule-bending for one customer can end up saving your business with other customers who may be standing by.

### 2. Avoiding a Trivial Argument

The customer is always right — at least that's what the customer thinks. Customers like to be right and aren't easily swayed when your business tells them otherwise. Even if the detail is trivial, customers will take the time to argue their point which negatively impacts customer experience.

This type of situation occurs regularly with technical support teams who deal with complex or intricate products. Customers will call support lines claiming a product or feature is broken and the rep will find that the customer simply wasn't using the tool correctly. Support reps will ask customers if they tried following the recommended troubleshooting steps and customers, thinking the rep is being redundant, will say they have. However, when they actually go through the steps with the rep they realize the mistakes they had been making all along.

Whenever a customer claims your product or feature is broken and you know that it isn't, the best conflict management approach is to avoid. If your product isn't broken, then there's no need to waste time arguing with the customer over whether or not they completed certain troubleshooting steps.

Instead, go through the steps with them and show them that the product works. The customer will be smart enough to realize that user error may have played a larger role than they originally had thought.

### 3. Compromising When Reaching an Impasse

Customers, whether they feel like or not, are logical humans just like you and me. They're capable of recognizing stressful and difficult situations, and they aren't interested in escalating them either. Customers are willing to come to compromise so long as it allows them to continue working towards their goals.

One example of this can be seen in the food-service industry. Have you ever ordered a late-night pizza only to be disappointed that the toppings were wrong? Even though you're rightfully frustrated, you're probably not grabbing your keys and driving straight for the store.

Instead, most customers will call the business to report the issue. If it's before closing hours, the restaurant will send a complimentary pizza. But, if it's after-hours, the store will compromise with the customer by offering store credit for a future purchase.

While the customer may still be sad and hungry, they'll often be sympathetic to the employees who are about to clock out. Rather than making employees work longer and deliver another pizza, the company compromises with the customer by offering a free pizza at another time. Both parties had to make a small sacrifice but in the end they each profit from the outcome.



#### 4. Collaborate With Willing Customers

The best resolutions to conflicts are the ones where both parties benefit without having to give up anything else in return. These situations are ideal for building customer loyalty but can be difficult to create and recognize. When your company does find chances to collaborate with your customers, it's important to capitalize on these opportunities and develop mutually beneficial relationships.

A real-life example of collaboration is the HubSpot Ideas Forum. This site operates as an open forum where customers can propose new ideas for HubSpot products. Users can upvote each other's ideas as well as comment on them to further emphasize a point.

HubSpot's developers closely monitor this forum to discover new ideas for product development. If they find an idea they like, they can mark the post to let the community know that the feature is being considered.

This collaboration benefits both HubSpot and its customers because both sides are profiting from the website. On one end, the customers have an outlet to voice their continuous needs to the business and potentially receive new products. On the other end, HubSpot is able to collect customer feedback and use it to create effective products and features. Both sides are gaining resources that help them achieve their goals without having to sacrifice anything in return.

#### 5. Competing for the Right Reasons

Some customers have a goal in mind and simply won't stop until they achieve it, regardless of the consequences. While this mindset sounds great for running a business, it can create serious conflicts in other environments.

For example, let's say a disgruntled customer walks into your store and begins insulting other customers, unprovoked. The customer makes offensive comments and actively tries to emotionally or even physically harm other customers.

This is a conflict where the best course of action is to compete with the customer. The customer is not only causing a distraction to your business but is creating an atmosphere that makes other customers feel threatened. No matter how much money this customer spends at your business, it will always be worth confronting them because it shows other customers that you value their business just as much.

#### Conclusion

Since conflict is a part of human life, respectively all of its aspects, it is impossible to avoid it in business life. No matter if the organization appears as an economic operator of the economy of a certain country or practices some other services, its employees will more or less enter conflicts. Modern organizations have recognized the necessity of conflicts and do not run away from the conflicts among its employees. Moreover, organizations frequently decide to encourage the conflicts within the organization. The key roles have the managers on different levels of organization that should be educated on the basics of organizational behavior, with the emphasis on conflict management. Only if the managers properly estimate the level of conflict within the organization, then they will be able to decide on the reduction or encouragement of conflicts. The aim of conflict management is to accomplish the optimal level of conflicts on which the level of organizational performance is the highest. It is crucial to encourage the awareness about the positive influence of the reasonable level of conflicts also among the employees. Except that, the employees and managers should be able to distinguish those conflicts focused on personality from those focused on business problems, and according to that encourage the conflicts focused on business problems to the optimal level, and reduce those focused on people.

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