A

Seminar report

On

Conflict Management

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of degree
of MBA

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Preface

I have made this report file on the topic **Conflict Management**; I have tried my best to elucidate all the relevant detail to the topic to be included in the report. While in the beginning I have tried to give a general view about this topic.

My efforts and wholehearted co-corporation of each and everyone has ended on a successful note. I express my sincere gratitude to …………..who assisting me throughout the preparation of this topic. I thank him for providing me the reinforcement, confidence and most importantly the track for the topic whenever I needed it.

Introduction

Conflicts are natural in all walks of daily life – both at workplace and home. Thus, conflict is ever present and both charming and maddening. But conflict is a complex and big subject. There are many sources of conflict. Conflict occurs when individuals or groups are not obtaining what they need or want and are seeking their own self-interest.

Sometimes the individual is not aware of the need and unconsciously starts to act out. Other times, the individual is very aware of what he or she wants and actively works at achieving the goal. It would be better to identify conflict at an early stage and come to an understanding.

The concept of conflict is controversial. Psychologists and sociologists have given different meanings. It is being defined as a process by few, an obstructive behavior, and goal incompatibility by others. Conflict can be expressed as:

Conflict is a process, where perception (real or otherwise) leads to disruption of desirable state of harmony and stability in an interdependent world.

What is Conflict?

Interpersonal conflict has been defined as:

"An expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from the other party in achieving their goals".

Unpicking this a little, it means that for a disagreement to become a conflict, there needs to be:

- Some element of communication: a shared understanding that there is a disagreement;
- The well-being of the people involved need to depend on each other in some way. This doesn't mean that they have to have equal power: a manager and subordinate can be equally as interdependent as a married couple;
- The people involved perceive that their goals are incompatible, meaning that they cannot both be met;
- They are competing for resources; and
- Each perceives the other as interfering with the achievement of their goals.

Types of Conflict

There are three types of conflict, Personal or relational conflicts, instrumental conflicts and conflicts of interest:

Personal or **relational conflicts** are usually about identity or self-image, or important aspects of a relationship such as loyalty, breach of confidence, perceived betrayal or lack of respect.

Instrumental conflicts are about goals, structures, procedures and means: something fairly tangible and structural within the organisation or for an individual.

Conflicts of interest concern the ways in which the means of achieving goals are distributed, such as time, money, space and staff. They may also be about factors related to these, such as relative importance, or knowledge and expertise. An example would be a couple disagreeing over whether to spend a bonus on a holiday or to repair the roof.

Definition of Conflict Management

Conflict management is the practice of being able to identify and handle conflicts sensibly, fairly, and efficiently. 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. This is important in today's market more than ever. Everyone is striving to show how valuable they are to the company they work for and at times, this can lead to disputes with other members of the team.

Characteristics of Conflict:

1. Conflict is a Process:

Conflict occurs in 'layers'. First layer is always misunderstanding. The other layers are differences of values, differences of viewpoint, differences of interest, and interpersonal differences. It is also called a process because it begins with one party perceiving the other to oppose or negatively affect its interests and ends with competing, collaborating, compromising or avoiding.

2. Conflict is Inevitable:

Conflict exists everywhere. No two persons are the same. Hence they may have individual differences. And the differences may be because of values or otherwise, lead to conflict. Although inevitable, conflict can be minimized, diverted and/or resolved. Conflict develops because we are dealing with people's lives, jobs, children, pride, self-concept, ego and sense of mission. Conflict is inevitable and often good, for example, good teams always go through a "form, storm, norm and perform" period.

3. Conflict is a Normal Part of Life:

Individuals, groups, and organisations have unlimited needs and different values but limited resources. Thus, this incompatibility is bound to lead to conflicts. The conflict is not a problem, but if it is poorly managed then it becomes a problem.

4. Perception:

It must be perceived by the parties to it, otherwise it does not exist. In interpersonal interaction, perception is more important than reality. What we perceive and think affects our behaviour, attitudes, and communication.

5. Opposition:

One party to the conflict must be perceiving or doing something the other party does not like or want.

6. Interdependence and Interaction:

There must be some kind of real or perceived interdependence. Without interdependence there can be no interaction. Conflict occurs only when some kind of interaction takes place.

7. Everyone is inflicted with Conflict:

Conflict may occur within an individual, between two or more individuals, groups or between organisations.

**8. Conflict is not Unidimensional:**

It comes into different ways in accordance with degree of seriousness and capacity. At times, it may improve even a difficult situation.

Conflict Management Styles

Conflict management must aim at minimizing affective conflicts at all levels, attain and maintain a moderate amount of substantive conflict, and also to match the status and concerns of the two parties in conflict.

Many styles of conflict management behavior have been researched in the past century. Mary Parker Follett described them as domination, compromise, and integration (involves openness, exchanging information, looking for alternatives, and examining differences to solve the problem in a manner that is acceptable to both parties).

She also mentioned avoidance and suppression as other forms of handling conflicts. Robert R. Blake and Jane S. Mouton then presented five styles: forcing, withdrawing, smoothing, compromising, and problem solving. The five styles in currency in 21st century, as shown in Figure 20.2, are:
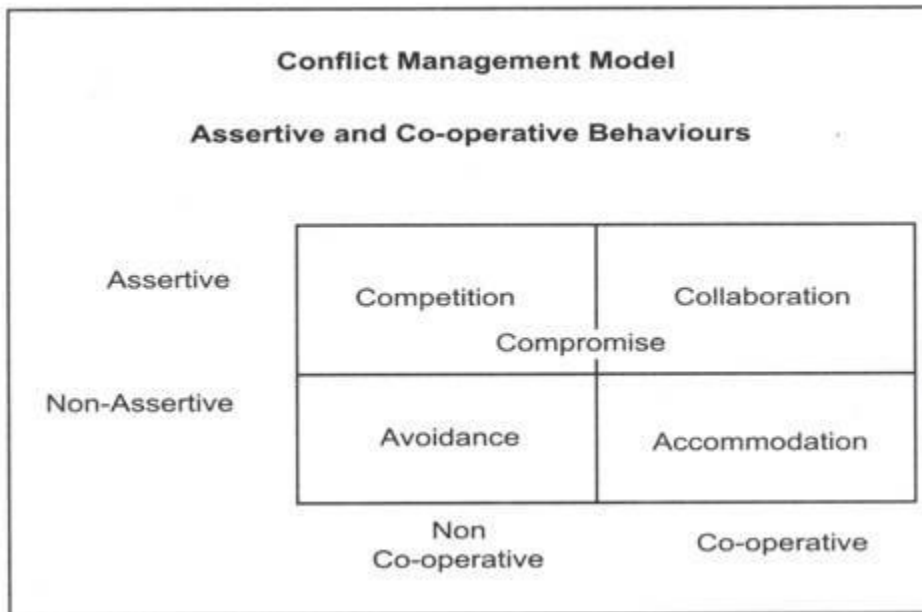
1. Avoidance (Leave-lose/win):

It is non-assertive and non-cooperative. The manager may think or pretend that no conflict exists or just ignore it. This strategy is used when the effort to resolve is not worth the salt. But this approach over the time worsens the situation.

Avoidance might take the form of diplomatic sidestepping the issue or postponing resolution in time to come or simply withdrawing from a situation. A turtle is a symbol for avoidance, because it can avoid everything by pulling its head and legs into the shell to be off to everything.

2. Accommodating (Yield-lose/win):

Accommodating is non-assertive and cooperative, just opposite of competing. To solve the conflict, if someone puts his interests last so as to satisfy concerns of other people by giving in, sacrificing, or accepting, or yielding to other's view point, it is called accommodation.

However, being too accommodating too often can weaken your position to the point where your voice is never heard. There will be high relationship orientation. This style is also used when the new approach is to be used in the very near future. It may solve the conflict for the other party, but a conflict will begin in manager. This style is not objective.

A chameleon is a symbol of the accommodating style since it changes its color to match the color of its environment. By changing its color to accommodate its surroundings, , the chameleon fits quietly into its environment.

3. Competing (Win/lose):

The style is assertive and non-cooperative. A person puts his/her interests before anyone else's interests. It is also known as dominating style. One stands up for his rights and uses all the power to win his position. There is low relationship orientation. Managers, using this style, want others to follow his dictates or get his way.

This style can be used only when one's leadership is established. There would be low relationship orientation Low relationships orientation a lion can be a symbol of a competitive style. The lion's roar helps the lion to satisfy its interests.

4. Compromising (Mini-win/mini-lose):

It is some assertive and some cooperative. Compromise is on the path toward collaboration, somewhere between competition and accommodation. The style means mutual give-and-take to satisfy both parties, or both may say, "Something is better than nothing." It has equal distance between competing and accommodating.

There would be negotiated relationship orientation. When the objective is to move on, not to stop the journey, the manager may compromise. A zebra can be a symbol for the compromising style. A zebra's unique look seems to indicate that it didn't care if it was a black horse or a white horse, so it "split the difference" and chose black and white stripes.

5. Collaborating (Win/win):

It is assertive as well as cooperative, just opposite of avoiding. It may also be called integrative style. This style focuses on satisfying the underlying concerns of both the parties, meeting many current needs by working together. Through this style, employees develop ownership and commitment. Sometimes this style gives birth to new mutual needs.

How to Minimise (Manage) Inter-Personal Conflicts? -The Managerial Action:

No manager should avoid a conflict, hoping it will go away. It would be better to ask the participants to describe specific actions they want the other party to take. It would be beneficial to have a third party (meaning a non-direct superior with access to the situation) involved. Finally, it is advisable not to meet separately with people in conflict.

A manager should take following actions to minimize conflicts:

1. Regular Review of Job Descriptions:

With the pace of change the job description must also change. But this will be possible only when the job descriptions are regularly reviewed.

2. Establish Rapport and build Relationship with all of Your Subordinates:

For it, meet them at regular intervals; ask them about their achievements, problems, and challenges.

3. Regular Reports:

A manager must get progress report about his subordinates regularly, indicating achievements, current needs and future scenario.

4. Training:

Every manager needs to be provided training in interpersonal communication, conflict management, and delegation of authority.

5. Mutual Development of Procedures:

For routine tasks, the procedures should be developed keeping in mind the inputs received from employees. If possible, encourage them to write. Such written procedures should be distributed to all concerned. If the need be, concerned employees be trained in those procedures.

6. Holding Regular Meetings:

The managers need to hold regular management meetings to inform subordinates about new initiatives to be taken and the progress of current programmes.

7. Anonymous Suggestion Box:

Consider such a box in which employees can provide suggestions.

Factors Affecting Conflict Styles:

1. Gender:

Some of us use assertive conflict modes because of our gender and particular kind of socialisation. Some males, because they are male, were taught to "always stand up to someone, and, if you have to fight, then fight". If one was socialized this way he will be more likely to use assertive conflict modes versus using cooperative modes.

2. Self-concept:

The way we think and feel about ourselves and opinions about others affects as to how we approach conflict with the other person.

3. Expectations:

If we believe that our team or the other person wants to resolve the conflict, we would be positive to resolve the conflict?

4. Position/Power:

Where do we stand in power status relationship with the person we are in conflict? It means whether the other man is equal to, more than, or less than us in status.

5. Life Experience:

Through knowledge and experience we might have gained skills about conflict and "conflict management understanding". It enables us to determine what conflict mode to use with the particular person with whom we are in conflict.

6. Communication skills:

The basic of conflict resolution and conflict management is how effectively we communicate. People using effective communication will be able to resolve conflicts with greater ease and success.

Models of Conflict Management

There have been many styles of conflict management behavior that have been researched in the past century. One of the earliest, Mary Parker Follett (1926/1940) found that conflict was managed by individuals in three main ways: domination, compromise, and integration. She also found other ways of handling conflict that were employed by organizations, such as avoidance and suppression.

Early conflict management models

Blake and Mouton (1964) were among the first to present a conceptual scheme for classifying the modes (styles) for handling interpersonal conflicts in five types: forcing, withdrawing, smoothing, compromising, and problem solving.

In the 1970s and 1980s, researchers began using the intentions of the parties involved to classify the styles of conflict management that they would include in their models. Both Thomas (1976) and Pruitt (1983) put forth a model based on the concerns of the parties involved in the conflict. The combination of the parties concern for their own interests (i.e. assertiveness) and their concern for the interests of those across the table (i.e. cooperativeness) would yield a particular conflict management style.

Pruitt called these styles yielding (low assertiveness/high cooperativeness), problem solving (high assertiveness/high cooperativeness), inaction (low assertiveness/low cooperativeness), and contending (high assertiveness/low cooperativeness). Pruitt argues that problem-solving is the preferred method when seeking mutually beneficial options (win-win).

Khun and Poole's model

Khun and Poole (2000) established a similar system of group conflict management. In their system, they split Kozan's confrontational model into two sub models: distributive and integrative.

- Distributive - Here conflict is approached as a distribution of a fixed amount of positive outcomes or resources, where one side will end up winning and the other losing, even if they do win some concessions.
- Integrative - Groups utilizing the integrative model see conflict as a chance to integrate the needs and concerns of both groups and make the best outcome possible. This model has a heavier emphasis on compromise than the distributive model. Khun and Poole found that the integrative model resulted in consistently better task related outcomes than those using the distributive model.

DeChurch and Marks's meta-taxonomy

DeChurch and Marks (2001) examined the literature available on conflict management at the time and established what they claimed was a "meta-taxonomy" that encompasses all other

models. They argued that all other styles have inherent in them into two dimensions - activeness ("the extent to which conflict behaviors make a responsive and direct rather than inert and indirect impression") and agreeableness ("the extent to which conflict behaviors make a pleasant and relaxed rather than unpleasant and strainful impression"). High activeness is characterized by openly discussing differences of opinion while fully going after their own interest. High agreeableness is characterized by attempting to satisfy all parties involved

In the study they conducted to validate this division, activeness did not have a significant effect on the effectiveness of conflict resolution, but the agreeableness of the conflict management style, whatever it was, did in fact have a positive impact on how groups felt about the way the conflict was managed, regardless of the outcome.

Rahim's meta-model

Rahim (2002) noted that there is agreement among management scholars that there is no one best approach to how to make decisions, lead or manage conflict. In a similar vein, rather than creating a very specific model of conflict management, Rahim created a meta-model (in much the same way that DeChurch and Marks, 2001, created a meta-taxonomy) for conflict styles based on two dimensions, concern for self and concern for others.

Within this framework are five management approaches: integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising. Integration involves openness, exchanging information, looking for alternatives, and examining differences so solve the problem in a manner that is acceptable to both parties. Obliging is associated with attempting to minimize the differences and highlight the commonalities to satisfy the concern of the other party.

When using the dominating style one party goes all out to win his or her objective and, as a result, often ignores the needs and expectations of the other party. When avoiding a party fails to satisfy his or her own concern as well as the concern of the other party. Lastly, compromising involves give-and-take whereby both parties give up something to make a mutually acceptable decision. (Rahim, 2002).

International Conflict Management

Special consideration should be paid to conflict management between two parties from distinct cultures. In addition to the everyday sources of conflict, "misunderstandings, and from this counterproductive, pseudo conflicts, arise when members of one culture are unable to understand culturally determined differences in communication practices, traditions, and thought processing" (Borisoff & Victor, 1989).

Indeed, this has already been observed in the business research literature. Renner (2007) recounted several episodes where managers from developed countries moved to less developed countries to resolve conflicts within the company and met with little success due to their failure to adapt to the conflict management styles of the local culture.

As an example, in Kozan's study noted above, he noted that Asian cultures are far more likely to use a harmony model of conflict management. If a party operating from a harmony model comes in conflict with a party using a more confrontational model, misunderstandings above and beyond those generated by the conflict itself will arise.

International conflict management, and the cultural issues associated with it, is one of the primary areas of research in the field at the time, as existing research is insufficient to deal with the ever increasing contact occurring between international entities.

Applications

Higher Education

With only 14% of researched universities reporting mandatory courses in this subject, and with up to 25% of the manager day being spent on dealing with conflict, education needs to reconsider the importance of this subject. The subject warrants emphasis on enabling students to deal with conflict management. (Lang, p. 240)

"Providing more conflict management training in undergraduate business programs could help raise the emotional intelligence of future managers." The improvement of emotional intelligence found that employees were more likely to use problem-solving skills, instead of trying to bargain. (Lang, p. 241)

Students need to have a good set of social skills. Good communication skills allow the manager to accomplish interpersonal situations and conflict. Instead of focusing on conflict as a behavior issue, focus on the communication of it. (Myers & Larson, 2005, p. 307)

With an understanding of the communications required, the student will gain the aptitude needed to differentiate between the nature and types of conflicts. These skills also teach that relational and procedural conflict needs a high degree of immediacy to resolution. If these two conflicts are not dealt with quickly, an employee will become dissatisfied or perform poorly. (Myers & Larson, p. 313)

It is also the responsibility of companies to react. One option is to identify the skills needed in house, but if the skills for creating workplace fairness are already lacking, it may be best to have an outside organization assist. These are called "Developmental Assessment Centers".

According to Rupp, Baldwin, and Bashur, these organizations "have become a popular means for providing coaching, feedback, and experiential learning opportunities." (Rupp, Baldwin & Bashshur, 2006, p. 145) Their main focus is fairness and how it impacts employee's attitudes and performance.

These organizations teach competencies and what they mean. (Rupp et al., p. 146) The students then participate in simulations. Multiple observers assess and record what skills are being used and then return this feedback to the participant. After this assessment, participants are then given another set of simulations to utilize the skills learned. Once again they receive additional feedback from observers, in hopes that the learning can be used in their workplace.

The feedback the participant receives is detailed, behaviorally specific, and high quality. This is needed for the participant to learn how to change their behavior. (Rupp et al., p. 146) In this regard, it is also important that the participant take time to self-reflect so that learning may occur.

Once an assessment program is utilized, action plans may be developed based on quantitative and qualitative data. (Rupp et al., p. 159)

Counseling

When personal conflict leads to frustration and loss of efficiency, counseling may prove to be a helpful antidote. Although few organizations can afford the luxury of having professional counselors on the staff, given some training, managers may be able to perform this function. Nondirective counseling, or "listening with understanding," is little more than being a good listener—something every manager should be.

Sometimes the simple process of being able to vent one's feelings—that is, to express them to a concerned and understanding listener, is enough to relieve frustration and make it possible for the frustrated individual to advance to a problem-solving frame of mind, better able to cope with a personal difficulty that is affecting his work adversely. The nondirective approach is one effective way for managers to deal with frustrated subordinates and co-workers.

There are other more direct and more diagnostic ways that might be used in appropriate circumstances. The great strength of the nondirective approach (nondirective counseling is based on the client-centered therapy of Carl Rogers), however, lies in its simplicity, its effectiveness, and the fact that it deliberately avoids the manager-counselor's diagnosing and interpreting emotional problems, which would call for special psychological training.

No one has ever been harmed by being listened to sympathetically and understandingly. On the contrary, this approach has helped many people to cope with problems that were interfering with their effectiveness on the job.

Conclusion

Conflict in project management is not necessarily unfavourable when properly managed. Several advantages have been identified such as increasing personal growth and morale, enhancing communication, and producing better project outcomes.

However, conflict can be the decline of an organization if it is not effectively managed. The challenge for organizational leaders and project managers is to try to maintain the right balance and intensity of conflict in project management.

By utilizing project management principles, understanding the dynamics of conflict, and learning approaches to conflict resolution, managers will be able to establish an environment in which creativity and innovation is encouraged and project goals are accomplished.

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