THE 7TH EDITION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
EUROPEAN INTEGRATION
REALITIES AND PERSPECTIVES

Organizational and Personal Dimension's of the Conflicts. Strategies for Managing Group Conflicts

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Abstract: The area of conflictology finds itself between the border of interest and challenge. Whatever the communication skills we might master, interacting is a difficult exercise; the ongoing interacting will determine the ongoing situations of conflict and crisis, as well. Conflict is a reality, a natural consequence of interacting; here is an approach that we propose in this volume. The misunderstandings are intermediary steps to conflict, generated by the different reception of the message, other than the intentions of the emitting factor. However, we are too vain to admit when we are wrong, as an emitting factor, when we cannot make ourselves understood and our messages are received differently than their main intentions, for which they were initiated (nobody understands me, we are on different communication channels: this is the way we think and behave in misunderstood situations). However, communication above all, is **perception**. That is why, misunderstandings are solved straightforward by using the communication techniques (we reformulate the initial message, making sure we made ourselves understood). This scientific endeavor's objective is to offer just such an approach in solving interpersonal conflict. Managing conflicts is difficult to handle due to the dynamics of conflicts also

Key words: conflict; avoidance; smoothing; dominance; power intervention

JEL Classification: D74; D23; M5; M54; O15; H12

1 Introduction

The single-party conflict would be two opposing opinions within a single individual. The value system may be in conflict with the organization's values: an individual manager may believe in "fair play" but the company asserts that "anything goes" and "all's fair in love, war and business organization."

Individuals involved in situations in which the individual's sense of values conflicts with what the organization expects or when the individual's ethical sense is radically different from the values embedded within the corporate culture may experience internal conflicts that can assume life-threatening dimensions. The organization may not be very sympathetic to the individual in conflict, believing that the worker should be efficient either go along with what the organization desires, or get out. Single-party conflict may also arise when there are two methods of accomplishing an organizational goal and the individual cannot decide which method to select. The two methodologies may be in conflict within the same manager and a third party, such as an organizational superior, might be needed to resolve the conflict. There is a great temptation to regard conflict, especially the single party form, as destructive. Conflict wastes limited managerial time and energy. It has the power to interrupt the flow and effectiveness of organizational communication. Ultimately, the desire to avoid conflict may produce uncontroversial decisions designed to "fit" within the acceptable range of organizational behavior.

Conflict can stimulate innovation in problem solving and thereby be beneficial for the organization. Individuals caught in a single-party conflict may become truly creative in finding a satisfactory

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solution that effectively reconciles either opposing opinions or courses of action. A sharp disagreement of opinion often leads to criticism and testing of the opinions, which will produce a better solution. The necessity of finding a solution that reconciles the conflict can spur the individuals involved in multiparty disputes into risking new solutions that previously would have gone unconsidered by either party. The emotional turmoil in the lives of managers occasioned by conflict can be offset by the creation of better solutions and managerial action. Modern business organizations are developing more effective methodologies for dispute resolution, and this area, **Alternative Dispute Resolution(ADR),** is rapidly growing (Montana& Charnov, 2008) The benefits of ADR are speed, confidentiality and often modest costs, especially when compared with the expenses and time associated with litigation in courts of law, or the human and organizational costs associated with interpersonal conflicts.   Additionally, ADR resolves disputes in a manner that they may be more confidential and appropriate to the individuals. In other words, ADR can be truly customized to the specific conflict. The parties to a dispute may ask a third part to help them arrive at a mutually acceptable resolution (mediation). It may actually ask the third's party to propose a solution (arbitration); or agree in advance to the third's party proposed solution (binding arbitration). Parties to a dispute may even agree to a private trial with a qualified judge (usually a retired court judge) and a suitable jury(Mina, 2011).

2 Paper Preparation

2.1 Strategies for managing conflicts

Since conflict seems a universal part of organizational life, executives must learn techniques for the management of the conflicts. By mastering various methods, an individual can increase managerial effectiveness. Some of the most used and effective methods are avoidance, smoothing, dominance and power intervention, compromise and confrontation.

Management can practice **avoidance** as a strategy for dealing with organizational conflicts. For this technique to work, two factors must be true:

  ➢ Management is not willing to ignore the causes of the conflict, or if one of the consequences of avoiding dealing with the conflict is significant harm to the company, avoidance is not an appropriate conflict management technique.
  ➢ Since these two conditions are rarely both true, there is a gradation of avoidance responses. The avoidance response can range from nonattention to partial separation that allows for only limited interaction between conflicting parties to finally creating a total separation of the combatants.
  ➢ **Nonattention** is one of the avoidance response within management totally ignores the conflict and never deals with its causes. Some managers believe that if the problem is totally ignored, and if it did not exist, it will eventually go away. To a certain extent this may be appear to be truth-given the passage of time, some conflicts are either reseolved, or, more likely, appear to be resolved. Even under the best of the circumstances, when the problem actually gets resolved with an avoidance response of nonattention, management never deals with the causes of the conflict. A conflict itself is often a symptom, and with a nonattention avoidance response, the basic cause may later result in the emergence of a different symptom. The nonattention methodology often results in the conflict getting worse. This leads management, committed to avoidance techniques, to employ other methods such as a limited separation of the combatants or, ultimately a total separation. Each of these, to a certain extent, recognizes that a conflict exists, but still does not deal with the cause of the conflict directly.

  ➢ **Limited separation**

When management cannot ignore that a conflict exists between two departments or individuals but still does not want to deal with the causal factors, it can avoid dealing with the problem by enforcing a limited separation of the combatants. This seeks to minimize the impact and expression of the conflict

by severely limited interaction because the conflicting parties are allowed to interact on a limited and sometimes supervised basis. This interaction is usually only that needed for organizational functioning, and there will be great emphasis on formality of relations. Often the meetings between the two parties will be characterized by a strict agenda, and no deviations from the agenda will be permitted. Such an agenda serves to control the limited interaction and prevent the conflict from starting anew. This agenda is like a cork placed on top of an active volcano; it prevents an eruption, at least temporarily, but it really does not stop the underlying fire.

This approach is similar to the inattention method in that it does not deal with the causes of the problem, only its symptoms. The problem can readily break out anew and be expressed in different symptoms. There are two major difficulties with the technique of limited separation as a managerial response to organizational conflict:

- ➢ Keeping the parties apart and "policing" the limited interaction can consume valuable managerial time, effort and organizational resources
- ➢ There will be constant tension between the two parties that can influence the rest of the organization in negative manner and adversely influence daily operations.

A final limitation of this approach is that may be unworkable conflicting groups that must have a great deal of interaction. The close supervision required to prevent open conflict may consume too much of management's attention and the organization's resources.

- ➢ **Total separation** represents the final avoidance technique open to management.

This conflict management technique features a total physical separation of the disputing parties. It is only feasible when no actual interaction is needed for organizational functioning. If the warring departments or groups are dependent upon each other in even the slightest degree, contact will be necessary and total separation impossible. The theory behind this approach is that the conflict will be totally avoided if the parties are kept totally apart.

The major disadvantages to this approach to conflict management are similar to those of the limited separation; tension persists and may be even reinforced by the total separation as the groups are divided between "us" and "them". Stories will circulate about the other group that recount and perhaps even create a mythology of past wrongs and misdeeds. Because the causes of the conflict are never dealt with, there is no real resolution and the conflict will continue to cast its shadow over the organization. The enforced separation will require the continued attention of management, consuming executive time, energy and organizational resources.

- ➢ **Smoothing**

Unlike the techniques just discussed, which seek to avoid the conflict, smoothing begins with a recognition that a problem exists. The emphasis, however, is on harmony and peace within the organization-the conflict is "smoothed over" as management emphasizes the similarities and common features shared by the two contentious groups, rather than their differences. Management seeks to create a consensus between the two groups so that they realize that what they share is greater than what is different.

The major advantage in smoothing is that it preserves surface harmony and peace, but it also is its major weakness. This surface harmony often serves only to conceal the conflict. It is always just beneath the organizational surface. There is the possibility, perhaps inevitability, that the smoothed-over conflict will rise to the surface. The newly risen problem may have festered and grown and become even more serious than the original conflict. Smoothing, if it works at all, is effective only in the short term. Over the long term, it will probably be an ineffective conflict management technique as the causes of the conflict are never identified, nor is the conflict really resolved.

> ➢ **Dominance or power intervention**

The simplest form of conflict resolution within the organization is for a higher level manager to impose a resolution on the two parties-***power intervention***. Also known as dominance because the senior manager can dominate both parties, this form of conflict resolution has two major advantages:

- It is the fastest method of resolving a conflict;
- It conforms to and confirms existing power structure of the organization.

Power intervention also has two major disadvantages, which must be considered by managers considering its use:

- Even though it resolves conflicts quickly, it may not deal with the causes of the conflict-the conflict can recur at a later date in a more serious form.
- Either one or both the combatants may resent the intervention of senior management in what they perceive as *their problem*. The disputing parties may believe that top management is **butting on,** and long after the conflict has been resolved, the resentment at top management's intrusion will persist.

Under the best circumstances, when one party believes that the imposed conflict resolution has vindicated its specific position, the other party may well believe that it has been slighted, even humiliated. For every winner there will be a loser, and if the imposed conflict resolution slights both parties, both sides will believe that they lost. In this feeling of being a loser when senior management intervenes in the organizational dispute that has led many managers to avoid power intervention and to try compromise.

> ➢ **Compromise**

Is a conflict management strategy that seeks a problem resolution that satisfies at least part of each party's position. This technique gives something to each party, and if no one disputant can believe he or she has been a complete winner, neither is her or she a complete loser. The emphasis is on finding a solution that resolve the conflict in a satisfactory manner; hence this procedure may create a solution that conforms to the lowest common factor of both groups in the attempt to compromise the opposing viewpoints. Neither of the competing groups will be completely satisfied with the solution, and this lack of satisfaction is negative feature of this form of conflict resolution.

There are several weakness to this approach. First, it usually fails to deal with the underlying causes of the conflict by focusing solely on the solution. Second, by its very nature the compromise fails to satisfy either party to the conflict. Finally, in reaching a compromise, there is the chance that the real problem will not even be solved as the decision making criterion is that of compromise-thus, if the most effective solution to whatever problem presented is to favor one group over the other, this solution will not be reached in the compromise mode. Because the reasons for the problem are not reached, no one is completely satisfied. Also, because the problem may not actually be solved, there may be residual dissatisfaction and sometimes actual grudges. In addition, there is a false assumption that compromise assumes the contending groups are relatively equal in organizational power, communication ability, negotiation, and interpersonal skills, all of which may be untrue. If either group is significantly more skilled than the other, compromise will be improbable because the more powerful group will simply impose its will upon the less powerful group.

> ➢ **Confrontation**

Unlike the previous conflict resolution techniques discussed, the causes of the conflict will be considered. This process emphasizes the understanding and attainment of the organization's goals rather than the individual goals of the disputing parties. There is the desire on the part of the participants to understand that other group's positions, and to that end groups may exchange personnel for a limited period of time. This is to facilitate understanding and it referred to as *mutual personnel exchange*. It does not solve any problems, but it does aid in creating a climate of mutual understanding between the groups.

Another useful confrontation technique is to emphasize the organization's goals that are more important or super ordinate to individual group goals. The emphasis on the super ordinate goals requires two managerial actions:

> ➢ Employees must have an understanding of the organization's goals;

> ➢ Management must convince the parties in the conflict that neither can achieve the desired organizational goal alone-they need to cooperate.

Confrontation is useful when both parties are willing to enter into process. Confrontation cannot be forced since these defaults into a power intervention or dominance situation. Each party must be willing to enter into a frank exchange of views and make a genuine attempt to understand to other side. The benefits of a confrontation can be outweighed by the impact of the emotions let loose. Confrontation consumes a great deal of managerial attention and energy, and if there is no organizational ability and willingness to devote the necessary resources (time and attention), confrontation should be avoided.

2.2. Organizational change as a source of conflict

Change within the organization often leads to conflict. Change often produces resistance and management may seek to overcome some of the resistance by *incrementalizing* the the change as it is introduced. People resist change because, however well intended, it threatens the status quo, the known (idem, 382). Individuals often exhibit self-interest as they act to resist change and preserve that which they know and are comfortable with. This is sometimes called *parochialism.* Change is also often resisted because of a lack of information-its content and intent are not known. One of the ways in which management can deal with the lack of information is to educate the workers.

Because the world of the contemporary manager is continually changing and businesses wish to remain competitive, change is continual. Manu business organizations have approached the necessity to change in a systematic and deliberate manner, called *organizational development.* That stresses an active approach to conflict management. It brings individuals and groups together to build teams and discuss the causes of organizational conflicts. This is a carefully controlled forum in which perceptions and opinions can be voiced and critically examined. Since this can be an emotionally trying process, the organizational development process is facilitated by a professional specialist. This individual may be part of the human resources or personnel department, but may also be someone from outside the organization. Although hiring an outside consultant can be an expensive proposition, it has the advantage of utilizing a facilitator with no vested interest in the outcome of the dispute.

Organizational development specialists make use the latest findings in industrial and personal psychology to effectively facilitate change. Such an approach may make extensive use for survey research techniques to gather information about the current state of the organization's and employees' attitudes. It should be noted that organizational development is an eclectic approach making use of a variety of change-agentry techniques. It is not an inclusive theory and it is not founded on a comprehensive body of research. If the theory behind organizational development is problematic, it persists as a managerial tool because of its pragmatic success.

3. Conclusions

Dialogue is designed for situations in which people have fundamentally different frames of reference (also called worldviews, belief systems, mindsets or *mental models). Ordinary conversation presupposes shared frameworks (*Yankelovitch, 1999*).* Dialogue makes just the opposite assumption: it assumes that the participants have different frameworks. The purpose of dialogue is to create communication across the border that separates them. It is a way of conversing that:

> ➢ *Enables a wider range of feelings to be expressed than in debate;*
> ➢ *Inspires more honesty and forthrightness than other methods;*

> ➤ *Avoids superficial, forced compromises;*
> ➤ *Generate learning, new options and innovations;*
> ➤ *Increases the likelihood that everyone will be heard;*
> ➤ *Seeks the deeper truth in each perspectives.*

Simply put, dialogue fosters the trust that is essential to leading through conflict. Its purpose is not to be nice. Its purpose is to be effective. When it comes to conflict, it is far more effective to build than to deplete it. Every tool we have used so far has helped to lay a stronger foundation for trust building.

> ➤ We committed ourselves to seeing whole conflict;
> ➤ We analyzed its elements and the larger system of which it is a part;
> ➤ We made sure that we are fully present to both the outer reality and our inner experience of it;
> ➤ We began to ask some initial questions to deepen our knowledge of the situation;
> ➤ We surveyed alternative ways of communicating in order to determine which of them will be lost useful.

Our goal now is to build trust necessary to create alliances between adversaries (bridging) so that they can catalyze new approaches to, and potentially breakthroughs in, the conflict.

Debate versus dialogue(Gerzon, M., 2006)

Debate

> ➤ Assuming that there is a right answer, and we have it
> ➤ Combative: participants attempt to prove the other side wrong
> ➤ About winning
> ➤ Listening to find flaws and make counterarguments
> ➤ Defending our own assumptions as truth
> ➤ Seeing two sides of an issue
> ➤ Defending one's own views against those of others
> ➤ Searching for flaws and weakness in others' positions
> ➤ By creating a winner and a loser, discouraging further discussion
> ➤ Seeking conclusion or vote that ratifies your position

Dialogue

> ➤ Assuming that many people have pieces of the answer
> ➤ Collaborative participants work together toward common understanding
> ➤ About exploring common ground
> ➤ Listening to understand, find meaning and agreement
> ➤ Revealing our assumptions for reevaluation
> ➤ Seeing all sides of an issue
> ➤ Admitting that other's thinking can improve on one's own
> ➤ Searching for strengths and value in other's positions
> ➤ Keeping the topic open even after the discussion formally ends
> ➤ Discovering new options, not seeking closure

Skeptics take note: do not dismiss dialogue as nothing more than wishy-washy, feel good camaraderie. It is about addressing conflict in order to achieve concrete results. Whatever business strategy or community vision one may adopt, it won't work if nobody follows through. With remarkable frequency, organizations in conflict seek more dialogue because they won't achieve lasting results without it. An organization or community can develop the clearest, most inspiring plans. But if those involved do not feel heard and engaged, and if their concerns are not taken into account through genuine dialogue, those plans will not be well executed. In the private sector, dialogue is being applied more and more often because senior executives realize their success depends on it. (Runde, Craig & Flanagan, 2008)

At every level of society-from schools and corporations to local communities and states, to continents and the world at large-dialogue is making a profound difference in our ability to transform conflict into opportunity.

Unfortunately, it cannot be intervened on the asymmetrical conflicts through face to face strategies (based on collaboration or enforcement). The power rapports fade away due to the intervention of a qualified and accepted third party by all sides, in managing conflicts.

This is the first element of the mediation's utility in managing conflicts.

The content of this paper constitutes a challenge regarding the approach in alternative solving of disputes, as well (from the anglo-saxon point of view, the cognitive reaction towards the term "dispute" is more appropriate in comparison to the conflicting approach: dispute presumes a broader opening towards functional approach of conflicts). Mediation is an alternative to the court's solution (more time and money invested); the role of the courts would be disencumbered and the concept of restorative justice would regain its rights.

Lobbying and advocacy policies will invigorate the native emergent democracy; public life will be exposed to a natural decisional transparency. The participative democracy, social entrepreneurship, the life of the civil society will be genuinely efficient by legalizing lobbying.

We propose an approach of the models of conflict which demonstrate that in many of the conflicting positions, we are tempted to consider that we have solved a conflict, when in fact, changed only its state (returning to a latent stage). Latent/camouflaged tensions are the great opponent of interpersonal relations. They presume a double/hidden transaction, among the addressees, in which we lie to ourselves and send out messages not according to the present true state of being (when we grind our teeth and clench our fists, thus adding another badge in our intrapersonal negative emotions' book). Do not collect those badges, do not stock negative emotions, classify and dissociate the assertive level, here is another objective of intrapersonal awareness, as a challenge of this article.

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