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CONFLICT HANDLING STYLES

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TITLE PAGE

CONFLICTING HANDLING STYLES

DEDIC-ATION

We dedicate this Seminar Work to God Almighty.

PREFACE

Conflict occurs when needs and desires of two individuals or parties are contradicting, consciously or unconsciously. In other words, conflict happens when parties are not getting what they want. Consequently, proper resolution is inevitable to avoid tensions and stresses that conflict may cause. Awareness of how people generally prefer to deal with conflict in an organization seems extremely crucial for leaders to play their leading role properly. Thomas-Killman Conflict Mode Instrument is broadly implemented to evaluate how people deal with conflict. Assertiveness and cooperation are two key parameters that are used by this instrument to assess people's preference for how to deal with conflict, resulting in five distinguishable modes: avoiding, compromising, accommodating, competing and collaborating. 36 engineering students and 21 experienced engineers from Iran along with 25 Swedish students answered questions of this instrument. Results imply both Iranian naive engineers and experienced engineers mostly prefer to avoid conflict. Similarly, both of them generally showed a lack of interest in competing mode. However, the results indicate that gaining experience intensifies the interest to avoid and disinterest to competing mode. On the other hand, the general preference of Swedish students for dealing conflict purports a profound contradiction with Iranian case showing a great sense of assertiveness rather than cooperativeness. The difference between the Iranian and the Swedish public preference is justified by their cultural dimensions.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

There are always few things that can please everybody. Conflict occurs when needs and desires of two individuals or parties are contradicting, consciously or unconsciously. In other words, conflict happens when parties are not getting what they want. Since people normally possess different traits and characteristics, lack of conflict may indicate lack of any meaningful interaction. Why conflict and conflict management should be a place of concern for organizations? To answer to this question directly, it should be considered that human beings are the most influential part of each organization. So, they bring conflict to organization when mingle in an organization. The dysfunctional conflicts among individuals have proved to have a negative impact on organizational efficacy and performance. Also, not exploiting constructive conflict is a place of loss for each organization. Any attempt to manage and lead an organization without taking into consideration probable conflicts, inevitably results in failure. That is the reason of why managers spend up to 30 percent of their valuable time to handle conflict and why conflict management as an undetectable part of leadership is as significant as planning, communication and motivation.

CHAPTER TWO

CONFLICT HANDLING STYLE

WHAT IS CONFLICT?

Conflict can be defined as an incongruity of desires, goals or values between individuals or groups, including attempts to prove their own position accompanying mutual antagonistic feelings (Fisher, 1990). Similarly, it can be comprehensively described as “a process that begins when one party perceives that another party has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect, something that the first party cares about”. In fact, a clash of desires, values, interests, attitudes, manners and methods usually spark a conflict. Conflict occurs when needs and desires of two individuals or parties are contradicting, consciously or unconsciously. In other words, conflict happens when parties are not getting what they want. Since people normally possess different traits and characteristics, lack of conflict may indicate lack of any meaningful interaction.

UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT HANDLING STYLES

In a dispute, it's often easier to describe how others respond than to how we respond. Each of us has a predominant conflict style that we use to meet our own needs. By examining conflict styles and the consequences of those behaviors, we can gain a better understanding of the impact that our personal conflict style has on other people. With a better understanding, you then can make a conscious choice on how to respond to others in a conflict situation to help reduce work conflict and stress.

Behavioral scientists Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann, who developed the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, have identified five styles to responding to conflict competition, collaboration, compromise, avoidance, and accommodation. No conflict style is inherently right or wrong, but one or more styles could be inappropriate for a given situation and the impact could result in a situation quickly spiraling out of control.

ROOT CAUSES OF CONFLICT

There are lots of causes that can initiate a conflict. Conflict can be started by poor communication, dissatisfaction caused by management style, desire to obtain power, ineffective leadership, lack of openness and so on. Three distinct main drivers of conflict can be recognized as: Power, Value and Economic (Katz, 1965). Power conflict happens once each party or individual is struggling to obtain more power and influence on each other that demands less power and influence of another one. Value conflict is a result of inconsistency in people's culture and way of life. It got affected by how people define rightness and it involves ethical issues as well. Economic conflict originates conflict in people's attempts to fight for resources that are always scarce. For example, two project managers in a matrix-structure organization should fight for shared resources that may cause destructive conflict if not be handled properly. Ambiguity (obscure goals and imprecision), the nature of activities and roles and a change in external ambient can be seen as other sources of conflict.

CONFLICT AND ORGANIZATION

In traditional view which was dominant about group behaviour through 1930s and 1940s, conflict was regarded as a major obstacle for proper function and had to be avoided in all aspects at all costs. The more modern approaches towards conflict were initiated by human relations scientists. They emphasized conflict as an inevitable natural phenomenon in human interactions that should be managed properly (Reynecke, 1965).

The paradigm in which conflict was seen as a negative natural phenomenon was abolished soon. In fact, conflict can be seen as a creative force and the only thing that should be done is to exploit this driver to innovate more. Therefore, the need for innovation can be intensified when things are not being run smoothly. Hence, managers are advised “keeping team conflict alive”. Generally speaking, conflict is both good and bad thing. However, the manner by which conflict is handled can use conflict constructively or destructively. Nowadays, conflict is assessed in terms of functionality that can either contribute organizational growth or hinder the efficacy and performance. However, the dysfunctional conflict among individuals has proved to have a negative impact on organizational efficacy and performance. It has been shown that effective conflict management has a straightforward and positive impact on team cohesion. It also alleviates the negative impact of relationship conflict and task conflict on team cohesion. In reality, effective conflict management can change downside effect of relationship conflict and task conflict on team cohesion to some positive - impacts (Teklab and Quigley, 2009).

CHAPTER THREE

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STYLE

Managerial theories categorize different strategies of dealing with conflict. A common definition is that people choose five different gestures once confronting conflict: Avoiding, Accommodating, Competing, Compromising and Collaborating. While avoiding strategy orients toward neglecting conflict, accommodating strategy lean towards adaption and concession. Finally, collaborating strategy orients towards integration. In fact, these five individual's conflict modes are assessed along with two principle dimensions: Assertiveness and Cooperativeness. Assertiveness attributes the quality in which person attempts to settle his or her own concerns, whereas cooperativeness addresses to some extend person is concerned to satisfy others' wishes (Kilman, 2010).

1. COMPETING

Value of own issue/goal: High

Value of relationship: Low

Goal: I win, you lose

People who consistently use a competitive style come across as aggressive, autocratic, confrontational, and intimidating. A competitive style is an attempt to gain power and pressure a change at the other person's expense. A competitive style of managing conflict can be appropriate when you have to implement an unpopular decision, make a quick decision, the decision is vital in a crisis, or it is important to let others know how important an issue is to you – "standing up for your right." The biggest disadvantage of using this style is that

relationships can be harmed beyond repair and may encourage other parties to use covert methods to get their needs met because conflict with these people are reduced to – "if you are not with me, you are against me."

2. ACCOMMODATING

Value of own issue/goal: Low

Value relationship: High

Goal: I lose, you win

By accommodating you set aside your own personal needs because you want to please others in order to keep the peace. The emphasis is on preserving the relationship. Smoothing or harmonizing can result in a false solution to a problem and can create feelings in a person that range from anger to pleasure. Accommodators are unassertive and cooperative and may play the role of a martyr, complainer, or saboteur. However, accommodation can be useful when one is wrong or when you want to minimize losses when you are going to lose anyway because it preserves relationships. If you use it all the time it can become competitive – "I am nicer than you are" – and may result in reduced creativity in conflict situations and increased power imbalances.

3. AVOIDING

Value of own issue/goal: Low

Value of relationship: Low

Goal: I lose, you lose

Avoidance is characterized by deliberately ignoring or withdrawing from a conflict rather than facing it. This style may be perceived as not caring about your own issue or the issues of others. People who avoid the situation hope the problem will go away, resolve itself without their involvement, or think that others are ready to take the responsibility. There are situations where avoidance is appropriate such as when you need more time to think of how to respond, time constraints demand a delay, confrontation will hurt a working relationship, or there is little chance of satisfying your needs. However, avoidance can be destructive if the other person perceives that you don't care enough to engage. By not dealing with the conflict, this style allows the conflict to simmer and heat up unnecessarily, resulting in anger or a negative outburst.

4. COMPROMISING

Value of own issue/goal: Medium

Value of relationship: Medium

Goal: I win some, you win some

The compromising style demonstrates that you are willing to sacrifice some of your goals while persuading others to give up part of theirs – give a little, get a little. Compromising maintains the relationship and can take less time than collaboration and resolutions might mean splitting the difference or seeking a middle ground position. The downside to compromising is that it can be an easy way out and reduces new creative options. If you constantly split the difference or “straddle the fence,” game playing can result and the outcome could be less than ideal.

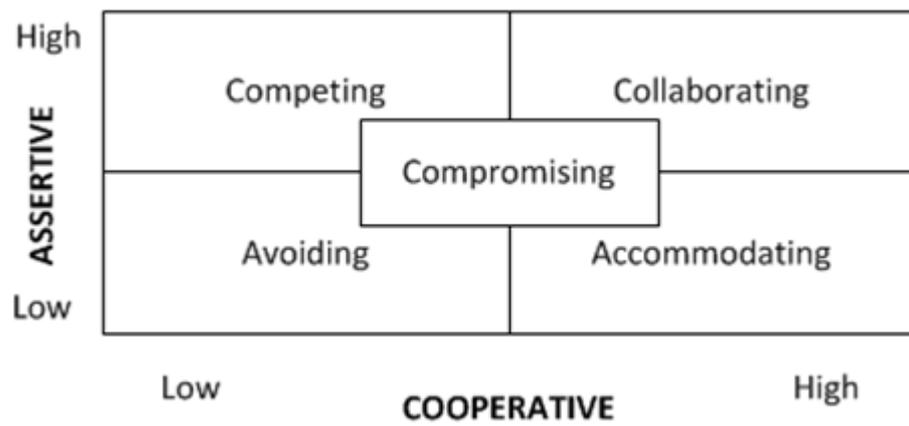
5. COLLABORATING

Value of own issue/goal: High

Value of relationship: High

Goal: I win, you win

The collaborative style views conflict as problems to be solved and finding creative solutions that satisfy all the parties' concerns. You don't give up your self-interest; you dig into the issue to identify the underlying concerns, test your own assumptions, and understand the views of others. Collaboration takes time and if the relationship among the parties is not important, then it may not be worth the time and energy to create a win-win solution. However, collaboration fosters respect, trust, and builds relationships. To make an environment more collaborative, address the conflict directly and in a way that expresses willingness for all parties to get what they need. Although all of the approaches have their time and place, you need to ask yourself the basic question, "Is my preferred conflict handling style the very best I can use to resolve this conflict or solve this problem?"



FOCUS ON INTERESTS (NEEDS), NOT POSITIONS (WANTS)

Understanding people's interests is not a simple task because we tend to communicate our positions – things that are likely to be concrete and explicit. It is helpful to learn to recognize the difference between person's positions and interests to assist in creative problem solving.

- Positions are predetermined solutions or demands that people use to describe what they want – what the person wants to happen on a particular issue. For example: "I want the report."
- Interests define the problem and may be intangible, unexpressed, or not consistent. They are the main reasons why you say what you want – the motivation behind the position. The conflict is usually between each person's needs, desire, concern, or fear. For example: "I need to receive the report by Friday, so I can have time to review and edit before the due date next Wednesday."

CONFLICT-SOLVING HANDLING STYLE

Problem-solving is a process which involves parties in a conflict to demonstrate their willingness to search for some way of handling their problem constructively. It involves dialogue and constructive listening. Listening means tuning one's energy into the heart of the other, and into the centre of their being. It seeks to both hear the words and hear beyond them in order to understand deeply the essence of their message. Problem-solving respects the person of the other and improves relationship. Thus, parties in conflict see the problem as belonging to both parties and therefore collaborate to find solutions to their conflict. The process produces a win-win solution and leads to lasting peace.

FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness is the intentional and voluntary process by which a victim undergoes a change in feelings and attitude regarding an offense, let's go of negative emotions such as vengefulness, forswears recompense from or punishment of the offender, however legally or morally justified it might be, and with an increased ability to wish the offender well. Forgiveness is different from condoning (failing to see the action as wrong and in need of forgiveness), excusing (not holding the offender as responsible for the action), forgetting, (removing awareness of the offense from consciousness), pardoning (granted for an acknowledged offense by a representative of society, such as a judge), and reconciliation (restoration of a relationship).

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Conflict resolution is conceptualized as the methods and processes involved in facilitating the peaceful ending of conflict and retribution. Committed group members attempt to resolve group conflicts by actively communicating information about their conflicting motives or ideologies to the rest of group (e.g. intentions; reasons for holding certain beliefs) and by engaging in collective negotiation. Dimensions of resolution typically parallel the dimensions of conflict in the way the conflict is processed (Mayer, 2012). Cognitive resolution is the way disputants understand and view the conflict, with beliefs, perspectives, understandings and attitudes. Emotional resolution is in the way disputants feel about a conflict, the emotional energy. Behavioural resolution is reflective of how the disputants act, their behaviour. Ultimately a wide range of methods and procedures for addressing conflict exist, including negotiation, mediation, mediation-arbitration, diplomacy, and creative peacebuilding.

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 an organizational setting. With better enhancement (Richard, 1979). Properly managed conflict can improve group outcomes.

Conflict resolution involves the reduction, elimination, or termination of all forms and types of conflict. Five styles for conflict management, as identified by Thomas and Kilmann, are: competing, compromising, collaborating, avoiding, and accommodating. Businesses can benefit from appropriate types and levels of conflict. That is the aim of conflict management, and not the aim of conflict resolution. Conflict management does not imply conflict resolution. Conflict management minimizes the negative outcomes of conflict and promotes the positive outcomes of conflict with the goal of improving learning in an organization. Properly managed conflict increases organizational learning by increasing the number of questions asked and encourages people to challenge the status quo.

CONFLICT SUPPRESSION

Suppression as a conflict resolution technique is not an adequate resolution procedure for the following reasons. Firstly, by definition, it suppresses or denies the causes of conflict and therefore allows the cause of the conflict to continue and possibly worsen. The common meaning of the term points to this implication (Henry, 1971). For example, Merriam-Webster refers to suppression as 'the act of withholding or withdrawing' and 'the conscious intentional exclusion from consciousness of a thought or feeling'. (Merriam-Webster Online) It also refers to the use of force rather than discourse or negotiation, 'forceful prevention; putting down by power.

Most importantly, suppression cannot be seen as a 'resolution' as it runs the risk of, in reality, perpetuating the conflict. This can in turn inflame the conflict by not addressing the root causes. This also relates to the fact that the resolution of conflict, through biased power-dominance and assertion cannot be seen as resolution but rather as an avoidance of the root cause of the conflict.

STRATEGIES OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

LITIGATION

Litigation refers to the resolution of disputes through the court system. It encompasses everything from traffic court and small claims to murder trials, class-action suits, and Supreme Court cases on the posting of the Ten Commandments. Litigators must be competent in three areas: the substantive law governing the subject-matter of the dispute (contracts, family law, criminal law, civil rights, torts, etc.), the procedural law governing how the court system works at all three phases of litigation (pre-trial, trial, and appeal), and the principles of good advocacy.

MEDIATION

Mediation is a dynamic, structured, interactive process where a neutral third party assists disputing parties in resolving conflict through the use of specialized communication and negotiation techniques. All participants in mediation are encouraged to actively participate in the process. Mediation is a "party-centered" process in that it is focused primarily upon the needs, rights, and interests of the parties. The mediator uses a wide variety of techniques to guide the process in a constructive direction and to help the parties find their optimal solution. A mediator is facilitative in that she/he manages the interaction between parties and facilitates open communication. Mediation is also evaluative in that the mediator analyses issues and relevant norms ("reality-testing"), while refraining from providing prescriptive advice to the parties.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

The attitude towards five distinct conflict modes seems to be disparate among different people. In other words, people have a different perception of these five conflict modes. For example, has claimed that compromising style is considered so favourable. According to the conflict grid, compromising is seen as an intermediate mode of handling conflict along with terms of cooperativeness and assertiveness. However, it seems that compromising is conceived as moderately assertive and highly cooperative so that competitive people consider it as a foible that damages the strength of this mode. Therefore, the perception of compromising is strongly correlates to the preference of cooperation instead of competition. In other words, conflict grid should not be seen as an absolute reality, especially once talking about the location of compromising in this grid.

Moreover, competing and collaborating are viewed as assertiveness characteristic and people with avoiding and accommodating styles known as unassertive. However, this statement should be questioned. Unassertiveness is defined as person's tendency to satisfy others' concerns. That means when people choose avoiding and accommodating style they care about others' wishes. In fact, this statement would be weakened by this fact that people sometimes seems unassertive because they don't care at all. For example, when a person doesn't care about the organization where he or she is working in, he or she would probably choose to avoid conflict not bothering themselves. So, these different five conflict management styles may give a slightly false impression of their real meaning.

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