

Literature Review on Conflict Management: A critical study

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ABSTRACT: Conflict management is one of the most broadly researched topics in the area of organizational behaviour. Conflict management has become the centre of gravity of human activities. The inevitability of conflict in social relations has made conflict management an essential element for human adaptability and survival. This is because the approach adopted to mitigate conflict will determine one's survival instinct and adjustment patterns in terms of how to live amicably with people to achieve set goals. The issue is that to live amicably with people call for the understanding of conflict dynamics and its management approaches in society.

This paper presents a review of past literature on conflict management in organizations. The purpose of the review is to identify research gaps and concepts of conflict management. On the basis of previous literature review, it has been found that only conflict and conflict management, the conflict resolutions are also important predictors of organizational success.

This literature review offers a synthesis of the past and contemporary studies about conflict and conflict management.

KEYWORDS: Conflict, conflict management, , organizational conflict, conflict resolutions.

I. INTRODUCTION

Conflict has been a common phenomenon since it is an inseparable part of an organization. Classical organizational theorists believed that conflict produced inefficiency and was therefore undesirable, even detrimental to the organization, and should be eliminated or at least minimized to the extent possible. Views toward conflict changed with the emergence of social systems and open system theory.

The method of research has been applied by means of utilizing case studies and descriptive material for a response on the basis of the management team and the employees. Identifying resources of managing conflict and conclusions, the aim & objective have to be noted along with

literature study overview and methodology glimpse research proposal. Management of conflict is the discord that occurs when the goals, interests or values of different individuals, or groups are incompatible and those individuals or groups block or frustrate, each other attempt to achieve their objectives.

1.1 Definition and Concept of Conflict Management

It is difficult to put forward a definition of conflict that is commonly accepted by all scholars. The conflict has been perceived differently by different scholars, indicating that the single phenomena of conflict can be given different subjective interpretations. Some perceive it as a reflection of interpersonal hostility, while others regard it as an interpersonal disagreement stemming out of different choices or preferences (Barki & Hartwick, 2001).

Earlier researchers focused on developing a generic definition that encompasses the entire phenomenon and its processes, such as antecedent conditions, emotions, perceptions, behaviour (Pondy, 1969). Corwin (1969) conceptualized conflict as some form of interpersonal or intergroup strain, or as actions (e.g., disputes and information distortions) that violate the norms of cooperation within the organization. A similar point has been presented by Thomas (1992), who identified conflict as the "process which begins when one party perceives that another has frustrated, or is about to frustrate, some concern of his" (p. 265). These definitions have a common theme revolving around the identification of elements that trigger and propagate conflict.

According to Bloomfield and Reilly (1998), conflict management addresses the more realistic question of managing conflict: how to deal with it in a constructive way, how to bring opposing sides together in a cooperative process, how to design a practically achievable, cooperative system for the constructive management of difference.

Conflict management significantly resonates with the fact that conflict is inevitable in

social relations, and that it cannot be eliminated or terminated, but should be constructively handled to get the best out of it.

Conflict management consists of interventions designed to reduce excessive conflict or in some instances to increase insufficient conflict (Hellriegel and Slocum, 1996). It also involves the diagnosis of and intervention in conflict with the appropriate styles and strategies in order to accomplish organizational and individual goals (Gumuselli and Hacifazlioglu, 2009). These definitions show that conflict management is a process that involves the adoption of approaches capable of reducing the volume and intensity of conflict to create a positive climate that will encourage the promotion of peace in society.

Some researchers have also explored this notion, identifying the presence of conflict as a result of personal and environmental influences on the group members (Almost, Doran, McGillis & Spence, 2010).

Robbins and Judge (2013) stated that conflict is 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.

According to Opatha (2015) definition, conflicts as a disagreement at least between two persons or parties with relevant to important thing which is an interesting thing to both parties.

II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The major objectives of the review are:-

- To know the concept of Conflict management.
- To evaluate the kind of research undertaken and available in the field of Conflict management in the organizations.
- To identify the gaps in the current literature.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out by using secondary data listed in different databases of Shodhganga, Google Scholar, and Research Gate, research articles, etc. For this purpose, articles were listed in the databases have been reviewed.

IV. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A few studies only have been conducted on various aspects of conflict management in different parts of the countries. However, the purpose of this chapter is mainly to record various facts and findings of previous research investigations in the field of human behaviour under conflict management. The researchers in the area of conflict management in an organization under conflict

management resolution have been also undertaken a by few researchers. It has been attempted in this chapter to throw light on these studies which are relevant to the present study some of the reviews of related literature are as follows:

Karl Marx (1818 - 1883) was a German theorist who wrote about and extensively criticized modern materialistic society during the Industrial Revolution. He is also called for origins and father of conflict theory. He argued there are always two groups in any given society constantly conflicting with one another, the working class and the ruling class. The ruling class struggles to exploit or manipulate the working class to function and behave in their favour, while the working class struggles to maximize their own personal benefit by seeking emancipation from the ruling class. Societies have changed greatly since Marx's time, especially with the rise of the middle class. However, each class continues to struggle for more benefits and comfort. Reading about Marx and his theories on society will give you a better sense of conflict theory, its origins, and how things have changed in light of today's world.

The problem of conflict and conflict management in the workplace has become an issue of great concern to both the government and private sectors especially in developing countries of the world including Nigeria. This is because, despite the operation of the existing machinery (e.g. collective bargaining and statutory machinery) for conflict management in Nigeria, the incidence of industrial conflict is consistently and persistently on the increase.

The incidence of industrial conflict in Nigeria has become so devastating that the socio-economic and technological development of the nation has been hampered. The inability of the available conflict resolution machinery to nip in the bud the menace of industrial conflict has prompted some industrial relations experts to advocate for better alternative options such as social dialogue, peace education, UNESCO's peace culture, and a host of others.

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 was employed by organizations, such as avoidance and suppression.

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

Robbins, (1978), the emphasis of this paper is away from the resolution of conflict to the management of conflict. The difference between resolution and management of conflict is more than semantic. Conflict resolution implies reduction, elimination, or termination of conflict. A large number of studies on negotiation, bargaining, mediation, and arbitration fall into the conflict resolution category.

Wall and Callister (1995) made the following comments in a review of literature on conflict and conflict management: we raised three of the most important questions in this article: is moderate conflict desirable? Is too little conflict as dysfunctional as too much? And should leaders, at times, promote conflict to attain organizational goals? Our tentative answers to these questions are no, no, and no. (p. 545). Wall and Callister's approach to handling conflict is inconsistent with the recognition of scholars who suggest that organizational conflict has both functional and dysfunctional outcomes (Jehn, 1995; Mitroff, 1998; Pelled, Eisenhardt, & Xin, 1999). Eisenhardt, Kahwajy, and Bourgeois (1998) suggested that conflict in top management is inevitable and it is usually valuable. "Conflict at senior levels surrounding appropriate paths of action what may be termed 'substantive,' 'cognitive,' or 'issue-oriented' conflict is essential for effective strategic choice" (p. 142).

Therefore, it is our conclusion that Wall and Callister fall within the realm of conflict resolution, which involves reduction, or termination of conflict. This amounts to throwing out the baby with the bathwater.

What we need for contemporary organizations is conflict management and not conflict resolution. Conflict management does not necessarily imply avoidance, reduction, or termination of conflict. It involves designing effective macro-level strategies to minimize the dysfunctions of conflict and enhancing the constructive functions of conflict in order to enhance learning and effectiveness in an organization.

Thomas (1976) and Pruitt (1983) put forth a model based on the concerns of the parties involved in the conflict. 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. The combination of the party's 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.

Rahim (1983) observed in his study that organizational conflict is considered legitimate, inevitable, and even a positive indicator of effective organizational management. It is now recognized that conflict within certain limits is essential to productivity.

Organizational conflict in educational systems is by no means the antitheses of the makings of quality of education (Rahim, 1983; Hanson, 1991: 290). When dealt with in a constructive manner, conflicts encourage creative solutions, lead to unity and support people through change and stressful periods (King, 1999: 11). Whether or not conflict benefits academics and colleges depends on two factors: the first one is the intensity of the conflict and the other is the way conflict is managed.

The inverted "U" curve depicted in the figure below shows that conflict of moderate intensity can be good for performance. This functional conflict, or constructive conflict, stimulates people towards greater work efforts, cooperation, and creativity. At very low or very high intensities, dysfunctional conflict or destructive conflict occurs. Too much conflict is distracting and interferes with other more task-relevant activities; too little conflict may promote competency and the loss of a creative, high-performance edge (Schermerhorn, 2001: 339).

The Relationship between Conflict and Performance (Schermerhorn, 2001: 339)

In terms of interpersonal styles, people respond to conflict management in different ways. These ways shift between the degree of cooperativeness and the degree of assertiveness. Cooperativeness is the desire to satisfy another party's needs and concerns while assertiveness is the desire to satisfy one's own needs and concerns. The figure below shows the five interpersonal styles of conflict management that result from various combinations of the two (Schermerhorn & Chappell, 2000: 218).

Degree of Assertiveness

Interpersonal styles of conflict management. (Schermerhorn, Chappell, 2000: 218) that conflict is somehow negative. No the contrary, Lobel (1994) states that the absence of conflict might be a sign of an unhealthy organization. Additionally, conflict can be constructive for

organizations because it can lead, if handled constructively, to change, adaptation, and survival. The key then is to engage in techniques that allow individuals and organizations to handle conflict productively (McNary, 2003 cited from Labovitz, 1980; Lobel 1994). Despite its adverse effects, today conflict is viewed by most experts as a potentially useful aspect of an organization because it can, if properly channelled, be an engine of innovation and change. This view recognizes the necessity of conflict and explicitly encourages a certain amount of controlled conflict in organizations (Dessler, 1998: 511).

Roloff (1987), "organizational conflict occurs when members engage in activities that are incompatible with those of colleagues within their network, members of other collectivities, or unaffiliated individuals who utilize the services or products of the organization" (p. 496). We broaden this definition by conceptualizing conflict as an interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities (i.e., individual, group, organization, etc.). Calling conflict an interactive process does not preclude the possibilities of intraindividual conflict, for it is known that a person often interacts with self. Obviously, one also interacts with others. Conflict may occur when:

1. A party is required to engage in an activity that is incongruent with his or her needs or interests.
2. A party holds behavioural preferences, the satisfaction of which is incompatible with another person's implementation of his or her preferences.
3. A party wants some mutually desirable resource that is in short supply, such that the wants of everyone may not be satisfied fully.
4. A party possesses attitudes, values, skills, and goals that are salient in directing his or her behaviour but are perceived to be exclusive of the attitudes, values, skills, and goals held by the other(s).
5. Two parties have partially exclusive behavioural preferences regarding their joint actions.
6. Two parties are interdependent in the performance of functions or activities.

This definition is much more inclusive, which implies that conflict can relate to incompatible preferences, goals, and not just activities. It should be recognized that in order for conflict to occur, it has to exceed the threshold level of intensity before the parties experience (or become aware of) any conflict. This principle of conflict threshold is consistent with Baron's (1990)

contention that opposed interests must be recognized by parties for conflict to exist.

Borisoff & Victor (1989) viewed some 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".

Bakare (1992) echoed the same view when he posited that male labour leaders tend to exhibit more aggressive behaviour than females due to their lack of communication skills. In a similar study that investigated communication skills and conflict resolution strategy of workers, McDowell (1990) as cited in Akintayo (2005) observed that a due to lack of interpersonal communication skills, male negotiators tend to express their opinions forcefully and prefer to assume control or dominate the argument. Whereas their female counterparts tend to integrate arguments and offer, tradeoffs to reach an agreement.

Kozan (1997) established three normative (not prescriptive) models of group conflict management. In the 1990s and 2000s, research began to focus more on models that would explain how conflict is managed within groups and organizations.

1. **Confrontational model** - In this model, conflicts are made of multiple sub-issues which are broken down and confronted by both parties. Both sides of the conflict are openly acknowledged, and a sense of reasonable compromise is important to the success of the resolution of the sub-issues involved.
2. **Harmony model** - In this model, conflict is managed mostly through avoiding it. This is accomplished through the observation of societal and organizational norms. Conflict is not seen as an opportunity to find solutions to problems, but as a harmful state of affairs. When conflict does occur, it is often handled through mediation by third parties.
3. **Regulative model** - In the regulative model, conflict is handled by strict rules and regulations. Bureaucratic means are used extensively to minimize conflicts or to aid conflict avoidance. When conflicts occur, they are defined in terms of general principles and resolved in a predetermined fashion.

Dreyfus (1999) asserted that emotional intelligence distinguishes an individual as 'Star Performer' and plays an important role in

determining which organization will out-perform in the global competition.

Goleman (1999) was supported the above statement & declared emphatically that emotional intelligence is a bigger predictor of workplace success than Intelligent Quotient (IQ). He stressed further that an individuals' success at work is 80 % dependent on emotional intelligence and only 20 % dependent on IQ. This goes to show that a highly intelligent labour leader may not be able to negotiate well without emotional intelligence that will enable him/her to manage effectively his/her emotion and that of others.

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.

1. **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.
2. **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. Kuhn and Poole found that the integrative model resulted in consistently better task-related outcomes than those using the distributive model.

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 behaviours make a responsive and direct rather than inert and indirect impression") and agreeableness ("the extent to which conflict behaviours make a pleasant and relaxed rather than unpleasant and strain 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 (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 to 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).

Ajala (2003) opined that good communication is one of the key skills to be acquired in peace education for successful conflict resolution.

Southam (2006) put it more succinctly when he described communication skills as comprising literacy, verbal skills and listening skills. This presupposes that a good communicator is expected to possess basic skills in writing, speaking, active listening and interpersonal communication.

The inference can be made, therefore, that for a labour leader to negotiate skillfully and manage conflict effectively he/she requires communication skills. This deduction is supported by the report of Trepan C & Getting's (1989), which indicated that improved communication skills sustain industrial peace and harmony.

Engleberg and Wynn (2007) conducted a study on "four Rs of conflict-resolution as a way for a third party to help resolve issues". Conflict can arise anywhere at any time. From the playground to the political stage, conflict is an inevitable part of life. Being able to understand the root causes of conflict and to calmly and rationally discuss and resolve conflict are valuable and useful tools for a successful life. In their book, "Working in Groups: Communication Principles and Strategies," authors

Engle Berg and Wynn discuss the four Rs are: Reasons, Reactions, Results and Resolution.

1. **Reasons:** When conflict arises, face it head-on. Discuss the reasons and causes for conflict openly and respectfully. Focus on the conflict itself and not on the people and emotions involved in the conflict; in other words, don't make the discussion personal.
2. **Reactions:** Have those involved in the conflict examine their own reactions. See if they can determine whether or not their reactions were destructive. If they were, work with them to develop more-positive reactions to conflict. Dissecting reactions can help separate the actual problem from the emotions that the problem may have caused. Often, the root cause of the conflict will seem less important once emotions are stripped from it.
3. **Results:** Ask those involved what outcome they expect if their conflict is not resolved. Determine what the detriments would be if their conflict is not resolved. Can anything good come out of an unresolved conflict? And, alternatively, ask them what the outcome will be if they can come to a resolution. What are the pros and cons of a resolution?
4. **Resolution:** After determining the core of the conflict, stripping away emotional reactions, and what a resolution would mean to each party, decide on the best way to ameliorate the conflict. Each party must realize that resolution involves give and take in order to be successful.

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 Kazan'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.

De Dreu (2008) observed that organizational conflicts included major theme of occupational psychology/ social psychology as well as organizational behaviour.

Bendersky et al. (2010) studied with quantitative and qualitative information, those researchers presented six dimensional group conflict structure.

Anwar et al. (2012). Intra-group conflicts refer to conflicts which occur within organization, departments to departments, branch with another branch and employee to employee.

Robbins and Judge (2013) identified three perspectives of conflicts which are known as traditional view of conflicts, integrationist view of conflicts and resolution focused view of conflicts. According to them, traditional view of conflicts believed that conflicts are harmful to the organizations and must be eliminated. According to integrationist view, conflicts can be treated as a positive force as well there is a necessity to eliminate the conflicts. Robbins and Judge (2013) also mentioned that resolution based view of conflict recognized conflicts are inevitable in the organization and organization should focus on more productive conflict resolution.

Riaz and Junaid (2014) mentioned alternative terms for task conflicts as cognitive conflicts and substantive conflicts. Second type of intragroup conflict is relationship conflicts which known as affective conflicts and emotional conflicts.

Opatha (2015) presented more appropriate classification for the reason for organizational conflicts. According to him, all the reasons for organizational conflicts can be categorized in to two main groups; they are organizational causes and personal reasons. Organizational reasons occurred due to issues in organizational structure and personal reasons can be occurred from the differences among employees.

Rukshan et al., (2016) observed that the main objective of this research is to identify the influence of individualism and collectivism on managing conflicts at work place. Researchers found that there is a positive moderate relationship between individualism and conflict management styles and there is a positive moderate relationship between collectivism and conflict management style.

Cheong and Kim (2017) opined that organizational conflicts can be aroused when there is an incompatibility, dissatisfaction, arguments, interdependence and mismatch between preferences, values, goals and attitudes between employees in the organization.

V. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This article includes a literature review of books, research papers, related articles, organizational reports, dissertations and literature available on the internet pertaining to conflict management in the organization. This paper includes the perspectives of various researchers pertaining to conflict management. According to the

literature review not only conflict, conflict management is also important predictor of organizational success.

The review of the literature also shows that a lot of research has been done on conflict management. The majority of the research has been made on the conflict management of employees and officers of enterprises or teachers of schools, colleges, universities and organizations.

Some of the studies focused on conflict theory, the principle of conflict, resolution of conflict models of group conflict management as well organizational conflict. Some studies explained managing conflict individually and handling conflict by the organizations. Some of the studies focused on the style of handling interpersonal conflict, task conflict as well as intragroup conflict. Some of the studies related to the problem of conflict and conflict management in the workplace for Govt. and Private sectors especially in developing countries. A few were related to the occurrence of conflict in the organization, group conflict management, gender

differences behaviours (lack of communications skills) as well as conflict resolution strategy of workers.

There were a lot of gaps in the literature in relation to sample size, population and tools used to assess these factors affecting conflict management. So some more large-scale uniform studies are needed in this area to handle conflict management in universities and colleges.

When a conflict arises, an opportunity for growth dies. There are plenty of ways by which conflict can arise; two of the main reasons are miscommunication and incompatibility. Conflict management is thus essential, especially for businesses and diplomats who deal with international issues. Conflict management is different from conflict resolution, since it is an ongoing process, unlike a resolution, which only happens when the conflict has already taken place. As conflict management trainers, we have to know all the activities used for training purposes.

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