

LEADERSHIP AND NEGOTIATION: RESOLVING CONFLICTS AT WORK

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Abstract

In today's culturally diverse workforce and structurally complex organisational setup, differences, disagreements, disputes, conflicts, and aggressive exchanges are not only common but can also lead to productivity loss. In such a situation, it is necessary that a pluralistic approach to conflict management and resolution is taken up by the top management of the leadership to not just manage conflicts but also to evolve protocols that are helpful in conflict situations. Furthermore, the leadership traits of top management in establishing a cohesive culture and providing certain autonomy to the team members can bring in some kind of stability and sense of cooperation in a team and can help in accomplishing organisational goals. The paper looks at the different aspects of conflicts and how the leadership needs to evolve negotiation strategies as well as a congenial atmosphere for organisational benefits, and to do the same, not just cooperation, but communication is the key.

Keywords: Conflicts, Disputes, Leadership, Management, Negotiation, Pluralist, Workplace.

Introduction

Disputes are common in the workplace, like any other arena of life. Conflicts of interest and grievances often lead to disputes that may even escalate into aggressive confrontations between employees. Often disagreements can lead to aggressive exchanges and feuds in an organisational setup. In today's culturally diverse workforce setup. Often, stereotypes of race, gender, and caste can also lead to certain conflicts. Such confrontations and hostility often make it challenging for management to deal with, as they affect organisational productivity. Also, within organisational dynamics, clashes between factions with divergent interests and ambitions can lead to conflicts. Sometimes, scarce resources can also lead to competition amongst employees as they fight over their conveniences. Thus, individual ego, social and cultural prejudices, political views, economic and other inequalities, factionalism, scrambling for scarce resources, personal conveniences and a host of other factors can lead to conflicts in the workplace. Disagreements are fine, but conflicts and hostilities pose a challenge for any organisation, so mitigating them is a tough task, where leadership can play a crucial role.

From a Taylorist perspective, 'deviant', 'antisocial' and 'dysfunctional' employee behaviour (Ackroyd, 2008) is often the root cause of disputes, though personal conflicts can also stem from absenteeism, shirking work, favouritism, poor etiquette during conversations, biases and stereotypes. Production sabotage and Labour disputes are another facet of workplace conflicts which management often faces in organisational setups. Often, the employer's expectations, employees' ambitions/ demands and the widening gap between the two can become a source of conflict.

The goal of conflict management for the leadership of any organisation should not be the assumption that conflicts won't arise, but rather the recognition that conflicts are inevitable and that protocols for conflict resolution should be put in place to maximise positive outcomes and minimise negative ones. By teaching one another and embracing diverse viewpoints, businesses that adopt this approach learn to manage conflicts effectively. "An organisation will not function effectively without a stable, relatively harmonious relationship with its employees." As a result, minimising negative impacts and boosting positive ones is of utmost importance in conflict management.

Two main ideas are usually acknowledged while dealing with workplace challenges. The common belief is that "labour relations" issues arise when there is a power disparity among

employees, which can ultimately lead to unionisation or, in extreme cases, external intervention. Alternatively, the view put forward by the Human Relations School in the 1930s and 40s, that an inapt management is the most vital cause of causing and perpetuating conflicts, still holds true.

It is therefore necessary that fresh perspectives and innovative ideas be put into practice to ease workplace tensions and prevent potential misconduct and deficiencies, and that employee grievances be acknowledged as ground realities and that a constructive voice (Hirschman, 1970) be established to address these issues in the workplace. When such an attitude is taken by the top management (leadership) of any organisation, it helps foster an amicable, cooperative attitude amongst employees who, instead of just voicing their grievances and disagreements, employ problem-solving strategies to resolve workplace conflicts. Lewin (2000) therefore asserts that this strategy is effective and dynamic, and is not merely about conflict management but also about predicting conflicts and finding solutions that do not hamper organisational goals.

Leadership and Negotiation

Conflict management (not just resolution) has recently gained significant traction in management theory as changing demographics and the structural complexities of organisations have increased workplace conflicts. With technological progress, the ease of doing work has increased manifold. Then, uncertainty about the future, job insecurity, increased workload, and incessant demand for innovation have made the modern-day workforce very competitive in spirit, leading to increased workplace conflicts. Therefore, managing conflicts has become the topmost priority of any organisation.

In a situation where specialisation has not just been the hallmark of academia but also of the corporate setup, dependency on other employees/coworkers has become a norm. Organisations work as teams, and within a team, each member depends on the others. With organisational hierarchies fluidly defined, the reliance on other team members to accomplish any task leads to increasing conflicts (Deutsch, 1998, 2000). In such situations, leadership roles have become vital to organisational success. Any organisational accomplishment is a team effort where collaboration is the key. Collaborative efforts enhance team cohesion and increase team productivity, but for that, leadership is required that focuses on conflict management. Therefore, Zhang and Tjosvold (2011) emphasise the role of transformative leaders who can work on team cohesion to increase productivity. These leaders think that rapport building is necessary for team cohesion so that conflict situations can be avoided. Hendel, Fish, & Galon (2005) also emphasise the negotiation competence of leaders in establishing rapport in any team. Fry, Firestone, and Williams (1983) found that ancient literature supports this trend by illustrating how unhealthy solutions, such as "half-bridges," can develop when couples become too emotionally attached.

The specific requirements of project management emphasise the need for having leaders who are skilled negotiators. These days, it is hard to run a business without project teams coordinating with other departments using a matrix structure. The project manager has several key responsibilities, including overseeing the team's financial progress, coordinating team members from other departments, and distributing resources effectively. The fact that several organisational units have conflicting objectives regarding the individuals they "lend" to a project compounds management's difficulty. Managing a project team involves determining how to allocate resources that are technically the responsibility of different divisions. Collaboration between the company and its divisions often makes resources easier to access.

Conflict Resolution

Interpersonal conflicts in organisational setup too can destabilise the amicable working environment of any organisation and can lead to productivity loss. Often personal traits of employees as well as external factors can enhance the chances of interpersonal conflicts. Here leadership has a vital role to play in demarcating employee autonomy and job task clarity. When the tasks are predetermined and reasonable deadlines for the same are clearly demarcated by the leadership along with certain autonomy to the team members to negotiate the task themselves, without much effort of micro-managing everything, the accountability of the employees is fixed, thereby reducing the chances of conflicts. Leaders should have faith in their team members and can thereby manage employees by establishing protocols and automated processes rather than overlooking everything. This approach can work wonders as the chances of conflicts reduce.

Enhancing workplace morale to increase productivity is only possible when leadership demarcates areas of integration and thereby promotes a cooperative environment. Diverse needs of the stakeholders can be prioritised by the leaders, and thereby, chances of conflicts are minimised. Such strategies can lead to fewer confrontations and less stressful situations.

Friedman, Tidd, Currall, and Tsai (2000) found that teams with members who work together had fewer disagreements and conflicts. When individuals resort to dominance or avoidance strategies during disagreements, the tension levels rise. Understanding human conduct can help shed light on workplace disputes. Therefore, leaders who cannot adapt to changing times may struggle to resolve conflicts, adjust to new situations, and engage in either overt or covert negotiations. Find out what kind of problem it is, how serious it is, how much time you have, and how powerful each side is before you try to fix it. One of the most critical skills a leader can possess for managing conflicts effectively is the ability to control their emotions and refrain from acting rashly.

Conflict Resolution and Team Leadership

According to an earlier study, some practitioners still hold a negative impression of intra-departmental conflict. Behfar and Thompson (2007) highlight the importance of recognising intragroup conflict. Thompson (2003) demonstrates that conflict can manifest in both beneficial and harmful ways (156). An empirical study reveals that team disagreements can either stimulate creativity and productivity, yielding long-term benefits, or hinder progress in certain situations. The increased resources that come from a diverse team are beneficial. But often such disagreements can also be hazardous for team productivity. Bringing diverse perspectives to the table for open discussion is always beneficial for any team, but when those perspectives lead to conflicts, it is necessary that leadership takes appropriate steps to find solutions. It is necessary that no conflicts are left unresolved, as that may lead to hostility and dysfunctional systems.

An authoritative system for categorising disputes between individuals shows how group differences can lead to different results (Guetzkow & Gyr, 1954). Affective conflicts stemming from grudges over personal issues are characterised by negative emotions and increased stress. Conflict in the workplace can arise from difficult-to-resolve group arguments. When people in a group disagree on or discuss various parts of a task, it can lead to cognitive conflict. A task conflict arises when individuals have different expectations of the result. An example of a process dispute is two parties with identical goals who disagree on the best way to achieve their objective. There is a broad consensus that communities and organisations may benefit from cognitive disagreements. Conversely, low morale and a lack of cooperation are consequences of negative emotions' harmful effects on performance, cognitive functioning, and focus.

Leadership styles, power imbalances, and variety in group makeup can all contribute to disagreements that escalate, according to Jehn, Chadwick, and Thatcher (1997) and De Dreu and Van Kleef (2004). Team members often clash over the performance award system.

Rewarding team accomplishments rather than individual efforts is a more effective strategy for increasing motivation and fostering interdependence among team members. This approach may prompt people to wonder whether it is fair, as it emphasises each person's contribution to the team's results.

Team dynamics debates will always arise, even though teams are inherently amicable. Because they overlap with affective conflicts, it is difficult to demonstrate that cognitive conflicts enhance performance (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). In a productive workgroup, disagreements are not seen as opportunities for emotional or intellectual confrontation, but rather as opportunities for exchanging practical ideas. Tjosvold (2008) states that numerous personal and social factors influence this capacity. Behfar and Thompson (2007) identified high levels of trust and intentional approaches to addressing internal disputes as protective traits, helping further discriminate between emotional and cognitive arguments. Thanks to this clarity, we may have a more fruitful discussion and make better decisions based on our increased knowledge and creativity. For teams and workgroups to effectively manage functional implications and resolve new disputes, members must be able to cooperate and resolve issues amicably. Groups and teams benefit greatly from differing viewpoints when leaders recognise the many kinds of conflicts and intervene strategically to resolve both the structural (such as establishing standards) and interpersonal (such as establishing trust) components of the issue.

Conclusion

Cooperation alone will not accomplish the task; clear and concise communication is essential. A key assertion in conflict resolution theory is that collaboration is essential for resolving conflicts effectively. Successfully navigating complex conflict situations requires, but does not guarantee, a strong social impulse to consider others' interests. People are most effective when they are eager to learn, open to different perspectives, and work together to solve problems (Simões, 2011). Several factors can encourage people to pay closer attention to evidence and to understand other points of view, which, in turn, reduces or eliminates the tendency to escalate conflicts. De Dreu (2005) emphasises the issues of power dynamics, accountability, and time constraints as the realms through which more equitable resolution of conflicts can be achieved by management within an organisational setup. Dialogues or open communication are the only means through which differences and disputes can be settled. Active empathetic listening often solves many issues, and when listening actively, solutions/resolutions to the interpersonal conflicts often emerge. Good communication of the leader in negotiation is the key, as by bringing a fresh perspective, the leader can foster a mutual understanding between the conflicting parties and thereby come to a resolution which is often mutually agreeable.

Thus, the most effective method for settling disputes, counter to popular belief, is effective communication. When individuals are unable to convey their thoughts clearly, even the most well-planned plans can be abandoned. Disputants can gain a greater understanding of each other's perspectives by listening attentively to one another; this, in turn, helps them to change accusations into feelings, blame into motivation, and "truths" into alternative points of view. Leadership can be improved through effective communication management by shedding light on fundamental difficulties and revealing egocentric biases. The initial stage in reducing detrimental and prejudiced beliefs about purpose is to adopt a constructive resolution approach.

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