
**WORKPLACE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT – ART OF BALANCING
DIALECTICAL SITUATIONS**

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There aren't any good guys; there aren't any bad guys,

There's only you and me, and we just disagree.

-Dave Mason (Famous English singer)

Abstract:- Its human nature to resist external control on their thoughts , action and behavior ,Conflict is inevitably just around the corner ,it may be between colleagues, superior authorities ,workforce internal and external stake holders .A good manager leadership qualities undergo the litmus test of management competency once he initiates conflict management techniques which in turn galvanizes the opportunity to improve situations and strengthen interpersonal and professional relationships. Conflict Management is truly a dynamic and interdisciplinary field encompassing social and behavioral science, conflict seeps from inside human psychology and permeates throughout the workplace in the process it accumulates traits, attitudes and characteristics from external and internal workplace factors making the task of conflict management a challenge for the Human resource managers. This paper aims at highlighting the growing importance of conflict management in workplace environment, the role of various external and internal factors affecting the working in workforce environment, how to identify the root causes of conflict and how corporate are attending such delicate issue without compromising with the workplace productivity.

Key-words: Conflict management, Thomas –Kilmann , Rahim, Pre Conflict management.

1 Introduction

60-80% of all difficulties in organizations stem from strained relationships between employees, not from deficits in individual employee's skill or motivation Daniel (2005)¹, According to Prof Ellen of University of Baltimore² Managers spends 25-40% of time dealing with workplace conflicts. Popular conflict resolution techniques like mediation and arbitration saved up to 80% company finance as compared to litigation cost.

Ellen argues that conflict if not handled correctly increases Lost management time coupled with decreased productivity , further The employees involved in conflict also devote considerable time and energy to the situation, at the expense of attention to their assigned work. Damaged relationships, decreased trust and employee satisfaction along with increased health costs and absenteeism due to stress further cripples the constructive business environment of the workplace.

The Crux of research undertaken in nine countries by Cpp Inc according to its CEO Jeff Hayes³ ,estimates that workplace conflict cost the US economy \$359 billion in paid hours, it further unravels that roughly one in three employees (33 percent) said that conflict has led to personal injury or attacks, while one in five (22 percent) reported that it has led to illness or absence from work.

Managers are not professionally trained to handle workplace conflict, Josh Bersin⁴, CEO of Bersin & Associates, a respected name in talent and recourse management has helped 10,000 organizations, including 75 of the Fortune 100 companies clearly points out that "If high performing business and human resource leaders are to turn conflict into positive business change, they must take the time to coach and train their employees to effectively deal with differences of opinion, style, and points of view."

2-Workplace conflict trigger elements and resolution techniques:

(a) *Discrimination Issues*:- Discriminatory conflicts can flare out from personal prejudices on the part of employees or perceptions of mistreatment of employees. a minority employee might feel that he is being entrusted to undertake a menial task purposely . Managers should immediately call the whole team and discuss and ensure that tasks are divided equitably and impartially and if need be the tasks can be rotated.

(b) *Performance-Review Conflicts*:- Its human nature to smirk a negative performance review which will definitely hamper the employees chances of pay hikes , promotion and other important incentives .This may lead to volatile debates with the senior staff accusing them of partiality .Such Employees may try to create a ruckus and managers need to have tactful

communication skills so as to explain what the employee lacks and how he can make up these limitations by going through a well planned time-bound plan of action to improve his performance thereby finally culminating to guaranteed incentives.

(c) *Conflicts with Customers*:- Sales and customer service employees experience conflict with customers on a fairly regular basis. This is because the sales team is under constant pressure to meet targets and there is frequent shuffling of sales staff ,while the customer service staff are always at the backend and seldom think of sales target ,also they are mostly senior in there area of work. The best way to resolve such crisis is to involve a manager who has the right to offer refunds, discounts or other conciliatory gestures to the customer.

(d) *Leadership Conflicts*:- Personality, ego and attitudes of individuals vary an over ambitious manger or a **lackadaisical** manager both will have clash with the staff ,The manager should be a mature and mellowed person who knows the pros and cons of his workplace and should be realistic in approach in terms of goal setting . Never believe that managers are inherently right and employees are inherently wrong; you may lose good employees.

(e) *Individual health and well being*:- Conflict theory and research sweeps aside the possible relationships between conflict at work, and individual health and well-being.Carsen etal⁵ presented a model that argues that poor health and well-being can trigger conflict in the workplace, and reduce the extent to which conflict is managed in a constructive, problem solving way. The model further proposes that conflict, especially when managed poorly, can have negative long-term consequences for individual health and well-being, producing psychosomatic complaints and feelings of burnout. Sometimes a simple personal interaction(counseling) with the grieving person can work as an antidote

3-Corporate workplace conflict management techniques:

A survey conducted by Price Waterhouse and Cornell's PERC Institute on Conflict Resolution⁶ of over 530 corporations in the Fortune 1000 category revealed the following trends:

- 90% of respondents view Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) as a critical cost-control technique.
- 54% of respondents indicate that cost pressures directly affected their decision to use ADR.
- 88% of respondents reported using mediation in the last three years.
- 23% of respondents use grievance procedures for non-union employment dispute resolution. (A decade ago only a small percentage used them.)

Similarly another study of Delaney⁷ found that 50% or more of large employers had instituted some kind of grievance process for at least some nonunion employees. The development of collaborative conflict management systems reported significant litigation cost savings:

- Brown and Root reported an 80% reduction in outside litigation costs.
- Motorola reported a 75% reduction over a period of six years.
- NCR reported a 50% reduction and a drop of pending lawsuits from 263 in 1984 to 28 in 1993.

Slaikeu et al⁸ conducted survey with 100 Human Resource executives in the US revealed the following:

- 86% have created written HR policy manuals
- 63% have implemented training programs for managers and supervisors,
- 57% have developed employee grievance policies.

4-Models for conflict management :

[Jennifer Lynch](#)⁹(2004)describes a model with two components:

ICMS Component 1: A new or updated dispute resolution model that provides multiple access points, options and safeguards to ensure that disputes are resolved effectively and sustainable solutions achieved, and

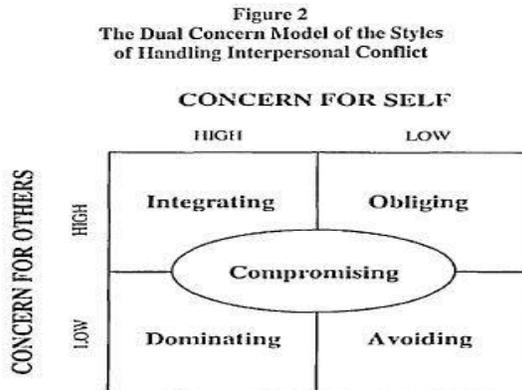
ICMS Component 2: Organizational elements of skills, structure and support that foster and sustain an environment where people will feel comfortable raising any issue or concern, knowing that their concern will be respectfully heard and responsibly dealt with.



5-RAHIM META MODEL:

Rahim¹⁰ (2002) noted that there is no universal best approach to how to manage conflict, Rahim created a meta-model in which are five management approaches: integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising. Integration involves openness, exchanging information and looking for alternatives. Obliging is satisfying the concern of the other party. In the dominating style one party gets aggressive to achieve its goal shunning aside the needs and expectations of the other party. When avoiding a party simply ignores the situation hoping that

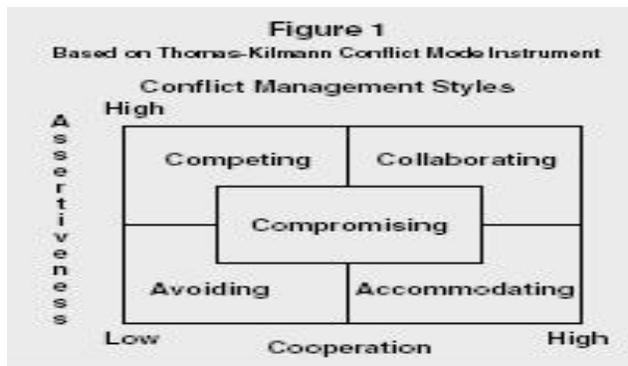
the problems are themselves resolved with time. Lastly, compromising involves give-and-take whereby both parties give up something to make a mutually acceptable decision.



6-THOMAS –KILMANN CONFLICT MODEL:

The Thomas Kilman model¹¹ has five Conflict Management Styles:

1. *Accommodating* – here cooperation is of a high-degree and the other party has a better solution. It can also be effective for preserving future relations with the other party.
2. *Avoiding* – sometimes its better to avoid the issue with a hope that issues will resolve themselves.This works when the issue is trivial or when you have no chance of winning but generally avoiding is not a good long term strategy.
3. *Collaborating* – Here you pair up with the other party to achieve both of your goals and have a “win-win.” Outcome,but both parties need to have high-degree of trust and sufficient time to hear everyone .
4. *Competing* – its a “win-lose” approach here you are aggressive and do not seek cooperation from the other party. This approach may be appropriate where we have to make split second decisions and people are aware of and support the approach.
5. *Compromising* – This is the “lose-lose” scenario where neither party really achieves what they want.



7-Conclusion:

Conflict is arguably inevitable and will persist as long as business workplace exists, what is important is how we learn to handle such situations and try to make them productive, Conflict management minimizes the negative outcomes of conflict and promotes the positive outcomes of conflict with the goal of improving learning in an organization¹². Conflict management training chapters should be introduced in business management degrees so that the future managers have well developed mental stature and emotional intelligence while dealing with conflicts and crisis. The improvement of emotional intelligence found that employees were more likely to use problem-solving skills, instead of trying to bargain¹³. Almost no one however talks of pre-conflict management as a subject, Pre-conflict management approaches and protocols should be inculcated in organizations whose sole existential purpose should be to avoid conflicts the organizations challenge will be to train HR managers on all sociological, political and psychological factors that are cause for conflict.

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