Functional and Dysfunctional Conflict: An Organizational Life

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ABSTRACT

In an organization, conflict arises and it needs to be solved so that the goal of the organization will be attained. Efficient and competent manager is needed to run the organization and he must be good in conflict management.

Conflict management is the practice of recognizing and dealing with disputes in a rational, balanced and effective way. Conflict management implemented within a business environment usually involves effective communication, problem resolving abilities and good negotiating skills to restore the focus to the company's overall goals.

The success of the organization lies in the hands of human resources so the management must treat them equally to avoid jealousy because sometimes this is one cause of conflict and managers must be honest and they must have words of honor.

KEYWORDS: conflict, conflict management, organization

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is a part of life of an organization due to the different values, gender, beliefs, religions, age, and culture of the employees. This is a challenge for the administrators or the concerned managers and heads to make solutions to solve if conflict arises but not all conflicts are bad. There are good conflicts which can improve the life of the organization. This serves to modify strategies and techniques in order to grow, innovate and have good atmosphere of the organization. Unresolved conflicts make human resources unproductive, increases tensions to employees, lead them to absenteeism and decreases cooperation among them.
THE NATURE OF ORGANIZATIONAL LIFE

Organization is a social unit of people, systematically structured and managed to meet a need or to pursue collective goals on a continuing basis. All organizations have a management structure that determines relationships between functions and positions, and subdivides and delegates roles, responsibilities, and authority to carry out defined tasks. Organizations are open systems in that they affect and are affected by the environment beyond their boundaries (http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/organization.html).

Every organization lives on two levels: the level of the things we see and that of things unseen. The organizational life we see is made up of all of our daily involvements, including strategy, goods and services, customers, policies, performance management, visible parts of culture and much more. This obvious life of the organization is where we put almost all of our attention. There is a Secret Life to organizations. It is exciting, dynamic, and bursting with possibilities, creativity, innovation, commitment and empowerment happened. Real and lasting change, when it happens, happens here first. To understand the secret life is to understand the organization.(Ariane, 2012)

Organization is dynamic. Organizations go through different life-cycles just like people do. For example, people go through infancy, childhood and early-teenage phases that are characterized by lots of rapid growth. People in these phases often do whatever it takes just to stay alive, for example, eating, seeking shelter and sleeping. Often, these people tend to make impulsive, highly reactive decisions based on whatever is going on around them at the moment. Start-up organizations are like this, too. Often, founders of the organization or program and its various members have to do whatever is necessary just to stay in business. Leaders make highly reactive, seat-of-the-pants decisions. They fear taking the time to slow down and do planning.

In our comparison of organizations and programs to people, we note that, as people continue to mature, they begin to understand more about the world and themselves. Over time, they develop a certain kind of wisdom that sees them through many of the challenges in life and work. They learn to plan and to use a certain amount of discipline to carry through on those plans. They learn to manage themselves. To survive well into the future, organizations and programs must be able to do this, as well. Experienced leaders have learned to recognize the particular life cycle that an organization or program is going through. These leaders understand the types of problems faced by the organization or program during the life cycle. That understanding gives them a sense of perspective and helps them to decide how to respond to decisions and problems in the workplace (McNamarra, 2012)

Organizational Life Cycle (OLC) is a model proposes that businesses, over time, progress through a fairly predictable sequence of developmental stages. This model is linked to the study of organizational growth and development. It is based on a biological metaphor of living organisms, which have a regular pattern of development: birth, growth, maturity, decline, and death. Likewise, the OLC of businesses has been conceived of as generally having four or five stages of development: start-up, growth, maturity, and decline, with diversification sometimes considered being an additional stage coming between maturity and decline. During the start-up
stage, companies accumulate capital, hire workers, and start developing their products or services. Toward the end of this stage, companies often experience explosive growth and begin to hire new employees rapidly, because business opportunities exceed infrastructure and resources. This expansion continues into the growth stage where companies increase their resources and workforces dramatically. The financial situation of companies usually improves during this stage, as company revenues grow and as companies establish strong customer bases. Despite their expansion, companies may still need additional funds to exploit all the available growth opportunities, so many go public at this point, too. The maturity stage is marked by security and by a slight slowdown. By this stage, companies have amassed assets and solid profits, by becoming established in the market. The primary area of business has become a cash cow because it controls a sizable market share and continues to yield profits, but experiences slow or stagnant growth. In order to avoid the decline stage, mature companies often take a variety of actions to renew their growth, such as acquiring other companies and expanding product lines. Some business theorists consider the foray into new markets a separate stage, namely, the diversification stage. If companies fail to implement measures to improve growth, they will most likely enter the fourth and final stage of the OLC: decline. In this stage, not only company hiring drops, but also company sales and profits. Furthermore, demand for a company’s products or services decreases. To compensate for the decline, companies launch downsizing or reengineering campaigns during this stage. If these efforts do not succeed, however, companies look for a buyer or shut down. As companies progress through the organizational life cycle the criteria for their effectiveness change. Companies tend to change their management styles, reward systems, organization structures, communication and decision-making processes, and corporate strategies. As companies mature, they usually strive to become more innovative or they diversify by making acquisitions. Despite the usefulness of this model, business scholars point out that companies do not always develop linearly as the OLC model suggests. Instead, companies may experience little growth initially and then experience decreasing sales, before moving into a stage of growth. Or they may undergo spurts of growth and decline, which makes it difficult to place them in any particular stage. Nevertheless, the model represents general patterns companies experience while developing. (Encyclopedia of Business)

THE TWO KINDS OF ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICTS

Conflict happens when two or more contradictory perspectives haven’t been agreed on, but it’s not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, when handled well, conflict forces us to be creative problem-solvers, to avoid mistakes, and to learn how to benefit from our differences, all while challenging us to broaden our skills (Sloboda, Rick, 2010).

THE FUNCTIONAL ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICT

Conflict forces us to be creative problem-solvers, to avoid mistakes, and to learn how to benefit from our differences, all while challenging us to broaden our skills (Sloboda, 2010). The functional view of organizational conflict sees conflict as a productive force, one that can stimulate members of the organization to increase their knowledge and skills, and their
contribution to organizational innovation and productivity. This more modern approach considers that the keys to organization success lie not in structure, clarity and orderliness, but in creativity, responsiveness and adaptability. The successful organization, needs conflict so that diverging views can be put on the table, and new ways of doing things can be created. The functional view of conflict also suggests that conflict provides people with feedback about how things are going. Even "personality conflicts" carry information to the manager about what is not working in an organization, affording the opportunity to improve. If you subscribe to a flexible vision of effective organizations, and recognize that each conflict situation provides opportunity to improve, you then shift your view of conflict. Rather than trying to eliminate conflict, or suppress its symptoms, your task becomes managing conflict so that it enhances people and organizations, rather than destroying people and organizations (Bacal & Associates, 2012).

Richards (2012) added that that conflict can be good for organizations because it encourages open-mindedness and helps avoid the tendency toward group think that many organizations fall prey to. The key is learning how to manage conflict effectively so that it can serve as a catalyst, rather than a hindrance, to organizational improvement. Furthermore, she gave the reasons why conflict is good for an organization and they are the following:

For conflict to be functional, it has to be seen positively in the following ways (Fay, 1999):

**CONFLICT ENCOURAGES NEW THINKING**

Although it is often assumed that people avoid conflict, many people actually enjoy conflict to a certain degree because it can be the stimulus for new thinking. Considering a different point of view--which represents conflict--can open up new possibilities and help to generate new ideas that might otherwise have not been considered.

**CONFLICT RAISES QUESTIONS**

Organizational conflict usually leads to a series of questions for those on both sides of any issues. Those questions can lead to new ideas and breakthroughs in thinking that can benefit individuals, departments and organizations. When there is no conflict, nothing changes. There is no need to question or challenge the status quo. Conflict represents an opportunity to reconsider, which can lead to breakthrough thinking.

**CONFLICT BUILDS RELATIONSHIPS**

Being agreeable is nice, but encouraging conflict can actually strengthen relationships. Organizational conflict between individuals, departments and even competitors can help to build relationships through mutual understanding and respect. Learning to listen and listening to learn leads to insights valued by both sides in any conflict situation.
CONFLICT OPENS MINDS

Organizations that teach employees how to manage conflict effectively create a climate of innovation that encourages creative thinking and opens minds to new, previously unexplored, possibilities. Considering the possibility for new ways of approaching challenges and meeting the demands of a competitive business world can result in improvements that benefit staff as well as the organization.

CONFLICT BEATS STAGNATION

Organizations that avoid conflict avoid change. Avoiding change is futile and can lead to the demise of even successful organizations. Companies that encourage staff to approach conflict in positive and productive ways can beat the stagnation that opens the doors to competitors and challenges and the ability to continue to provide customers with new and innovation solutions to meet their needs.

THE DYSFUNCTIONAL ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICT

The dysfunctional view of organizational conflict is imbedded in the notion that organizations are created to achieve goals by creating structures that perfectly define job responsibilities, authorities, and other job functions. Like a clockwork watch, each "cog" knows where it fits, knows what it must do and knows how it relates to other parts. This traditional view of organizations values orderliness, stability and the repression of any conflict that occurs. Using the timepiece analogy we can see the sense in this. What would happen to time-telling if the gears in our traditional watches decided to become less traditional, and re-define their roles in the system? To the "traditional" organizational thinker, conflict implies that the organization is not designed or structured correctly or adequately. Common remedies would be to further elaborate job descriptions, authorities and responsibilities, increase the use of central power (discipline), separate conflicting members, etc. This view of organizations and conflict causes problems. Unfortunately, most of us, consciously or unconsciously, value some of the characteristics of this "orderly" environment. Problems arise when we do not realize that this way of looking at organizations and conflict only fits organizations that work in routine ways where innovation and change are virtually eliminated. Virtually all government organizations work within a very disorderly context -- one characterized by constant change and a need for constant adaptation. Trying to "structure away" conflict and disagreement in a dynamic environment requires tremendous amounts of energy, and will also suppress any positive outcomes that may come from disagreement, such as improved decision-making and innovation ((Bacal & Associates, 2012).

People who work in environments where conflict isn't managed effectively tend to exhibit both low job satisfaction and reduced productivity. The overall culture of the group or organization tends to be very negative (White, 2012)..
WAYS ON HOW TO HANDLE ORGANIZATIONAL LIFE

Conflict cannot be avoided because it is part of organizational life. However, full-blown conflict naturally will not bring good effect to the organization. Thus conflict has to be minimized. Many people say, it is better to prevent than to cure. It takes a lot of effort and energy to solve conflicts. A manager has to minimize and prevent conflict by maintaining and implementing certain measures. Kanade (2011, 2012) stated in his article that there are seven (7) qualities of a good manager to sustain the life of the healthy organization and they are the following:

1. **Communication**
   The success of every business depends on the teamwork of its employees. Effective communication is the key to make the goals or the targets of the organization, clear to each and every employee. It is also a key to harness energy, with a word of encouragement for the employees, at the individual and team level. On the other hand, he needs to be firmed with a misbehaving staff member and communicate a warning using firm words.

2. **Knowledge**
   As a manager, you must put extra efforts to know all about the business you are involved in. You must have specific information about the business activities and practices of your organization. Your knowledge is incomplete, if you do not know what your competitors are doing to promote their services and products. The perfectness of your business knowledge will enable you to arrive at a timely decision and act decisively. It will also help you in planning, organizing tasks and meeting targets.

3. **Handling of Staff**
   Knowing how to handle the staff is of at most importance to any manager. Each man is different from the other and needs different approach to cultivate, motivate and inspire. A good manager recognizes the need for self-fulfillment and recognition of each employee. A little tactful approach in this matter, works well for a manager.

4. **Reliability**
   The key is to promise within the reason and deliver more. Trust is the most fragile commodity. You have to gain the trust of your employees. It is also necessary to demonstrate to them that you are fair in dealing with all of them. Your willingness to listen patiently to their problems and complaints will be your goodwill. Reliability is one of the good attributes. Without this attribute, it is hard to see a person, succeed as a manager.

5. **Delegation**
   Even though, you are the decision maker, you cannot do all the work yourself. It is necessary to delegate some of your responsibility to your juniors. It is important to choose safe hands and a sound mind to take up a part of the workload off you. You should also make it quite clear that with authority goes responsibility.
6. **Introspection**

A manager must know the importance of introspection. It helps him to understand how effective is the management style he is using to conduct his business. It also helps him understand which aspect of the business or his own personality is the driving factor. For him it is important to know, whether it is having a good or bad effect on his decision-making capability and so on.

7. **Fair Play**

It is never easy to be unbiased. When there are two individuals then there are two different views about how to interpret or execute a thing. This leads to frictions, however negligible, in their relationship. Damaging effects are also applicable to the decisions taken for a business organization. Though such issues are not personal, egos are primed; lines are formed and the battles are fought. This totally sidetracks the issue at hand or it becomes personality centric, and the decisions are taken on the basis of emotions rather than on the basis of merits. When it comes to delegating responsibilities or when it is time for promotions or attributing success to, there are chances that such an opponent is downplayed by his manager. That is why a manager's ability to play fair and be unbiased towards each staff member is of really importance. A good manager is a solution-minded person trying to put together a self-directed and motivated team. When the team is lagging in achieving the target, he or she pinpoints the weak points, in the chain of execution and tries to find to solution. This is a time when he needs to show determination and strength of character. One of the traits is that whatever the situation, he holds his forte and does not let the stress of the job cloud his judgment and response.

**CONCLUSION**

The importance of managing conflict is evident. Reducing the negative effects and increasing the positive impacts is critical in a balanced workplace. Leaders must skirt the fine line of reducing conflict and allow conflict to foster good results. Clearly, leadership must manage some conflict to reduce its impact while allowing some conflict to remain unmanaged in order to increase overall results. In today’s rapidly changing workplace environments, conflict and change are formidable challenges to meet. Both have the potential to greatly impact an organization’s workforce, and, ultimately, its bottom line. Managers must possess an understanding of human behavior and an ability to create healthy, secure work environments. They must also be able to meet the needs of individual employees, while still achieving organizational goals. Exemplary leaders understand that excellent management principles are vital for keeping pace in a rapidly changing world. They know these principles are the tools that help to create empowered employees and strong organizations (McDowell, et al). Conflict should be handled properly in order to maintain the relationship between the employers and employees so that the organization will attain its goal.
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