

Conflict at work

Literature



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“ Interpersonal Conflict occurs between two or more persons when attitudes, motives, values, expectations or activities are incompatible and if those people perceive themselves to be in disagreement” (John Hunt, 1982)

Conflict Theory Conflict theory talks about why people think and act the way they do and what conditions and causes influence a certain response in human behaviour. While there have been many different views on conflict theory and it has taken a multitude of different forms, it often seems that the Marxian theory is the one that represents the predominant example of conflict theory in sociological literature. The Marxist theory of conflict argues that there is a huge difference between social classes; the wealthy and the poor and that power plays a significant role in initiating conflicts as the powerful groups use their power in order to exploit groups with less power.

What leads to conflict? Value Differences : Values are beliefs that help people make decisions about what is right or wrong, good or bad, and normal or not normal. People always have different life experiences, so ultimately different sets of values and beliefs guide their decisions and behaviour. People struggle over religion, politics, race, humanitarian issues, ethics and morals, abortion, sex, and more. Based on different beliefs, the value system is a strong driver of behaviour and a frequent source of conflict in general.

Misinterpretations/lack of communication: Instructions are often misinterpreted. The ability to communicate is one of the most commonly used skills. As such, sometimes communication is taken for granted so the words that are used do not always clearly state the picture in people’s minds. When this occurs, errors often result that lead to frustration.

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Depending on a multitude of factors (stress level for one), the error sometimes results in conflict if neither person is willing to accept responsibility for it. If tasks are not clearly defined or delegated, it normally leads to conflict. For example, based on a survey we carried out at the residential at North Hampton, the main reason for conflict was the 'lack of communication'.

Competition for resources: Conflicts arise when people are competing for the same resources (such as territory, jobs and income, housing) when they are not fairly distributed or when there are not enough to go round. The same applies to natural resources (cultivable land, fresh water). Therefore, because resources are scarce, people have no choice but to compete leading to conflict.

Personality conflict: People are different and thus have different personalities. Some people naturally behave or handle a situation in a certain manner. It is because of this difference that personalities 'clash' which leads to a conflict. Experts say that our personalities are genetically determined resulting in different sets of preferred behaviours.

Lack of Cooperation: The lack of cooperation could also lead to conflict when one person's progress is dependent on the other. A person's job could depend on someone else's co-operation, output or input. For example if a sales-person is constantly late inputting the monthly sales figures, it would cause the accountant to be late with the reports.

Goal differences: Many people have different motives, therefore this may affect the decisions they make. When goals differ between individuals, teams

or entities, it affects overall progress which eventually leads to conflict. How to deal with Conflict?

The Thomas-Kilmann conflict mode Instrument (TKI), introduced in 1974 by Kenneth W. Thomas and Ralph H. Kilmann, is a self-scoring exercise that has been the leader in conflict resolution assessment for more than 30 years. The TKI model helps people to identify their normal behavior in conflict situations. For conflict situations, the TKI describes an individual's behavior along two basic dimensions: assertiveness, the extent to which the individual tries to satisfy his or her own concerns, and cooperativeness, the extent to which the individual tries to satisfy the concerns of another person.

Figure 1. Conflict handling skills: five modes (Adapted from Thomas, K. W. and Kilmann, R. H., 1974, *Working in Organisations*, Kakabadse, Bank & Vinnicombe, 2005)

Advantages and Disadvantages of Conflict As conflict is created under disagreement and often disputation, it is natural to have negative impact. When people engage in misplaced competitive behavior, then the conflict comes and both the organization and individuals suffer. The difficulty of facing a conflict is that it can often be destructive and feels acutely uncomfortable to the participants as well as to the onlookers. However, the benefits of a conflict seem to be more. Many authors argue that conflict can become inevitable and even more constructive.

More creative solutions to problems can instantly be addressed and it helps people to tackle their socio-emotional issues. Furthermore sometimes it clears the air for more concentrated attention on assignments. Many

organizations have established that conflict is a healthy sign and can be really creative and they tend to encourage it when appears. Managers believe that without creative conflict, the organization could lapse into apathy. A study, which has been conducted by three academics; Kathleen M. Eisenhard, Jean L. Kahwajy and L. J. Bourgeois, (1997), examined a dozen top teams in great companies over a ten year period and set out the benefits of a conflict.

They state that a conflict, when it is actively managed, highlight the role of emotion in business decision making and leads to a high performing standard. Finally they point out that conflict seems to be valuable, as it provides executives with a more inclusive range of information, a thorough understanding of issues and a rich variety of solutions; hence on they become more effective and quicker in difficult situations. It is characteristically mentioned that “ teams unable to foster substantive conflict ultimately achieve, on average, lower performance”(pp 84-5).

Our Experience in this Module Our experience as a team in this module helped us realise that: * There was no clash in personalities * Each team member tried to solve matters before a disagreement would arise everyone was responsible for their own tasks * However, there was a slight conflict in a residential activity where due to time constraints and the willingness to win, we were not sure and confident about what we were doing. That was a point where slight disagreements happened but were later resolved by communication which helped the team positively.

Our research on Conflict In order to understand the real experience about conflict, we designed -within a qualitative research- a simple questionnaire <https://assignbuster.com/conflict-at-work/>

with five open-ended questions (sample of the questionnaire is given in Appendix). It must be mentioned that this particular research examines difficult situations that lead to conflict only in the framework of teamwork. The questionnaire had been firstly distributed through emails to all groups from Events Marketing Management and Sports Management which have experienced teamwork either in the Residential or in any other assignment. Unfortunately this method of distributing was unsuccessful; hence we decided to gather the information in different way. The survey was then conducted in the library and the classroom to the same target group collecting the data face to face. We finally collected nine questionnaires out of fifteen, meaning that the six remaining questionnaires were by people who didn't experience any conflict.

Results The data of the questionnaires showed that six out of nine (66%) groups have experienced negative conflicts and three out of nine (34%) positive conflicts which means that conflict can be beneficial in certain situations. In this case, positive conflict occurred when the teams developed a better understanding amongst each other therefore, resulting in better task results. However, if there were no conflicts at all, these teams would not have performed that effectively. “ The very best companies actually encourage conflict in their top teams and actively manage it” (Kakabadse, Bank & Vinnicombe, 2005) According to the data the main reason for negative conflict is lack of communication between the members of the group. There was another aspect that was commonly found through the research that the teams, when they were unable to understand each other, required a third party to resolve it.