Sources of conflict in organziations assignment

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SOURCES OF CONFLICT IN ORGANIZATIONS Understanding conflict in organizations is critical so that one can actively participate in its management. Conflict is inevitable and is usually perceived as negative. An organization that does not effectively manage conflict will remain stagnant and even possibly degrade over time. However, conflict can be a positive catalyst for change and move an organization forward. Conflict is quite normal and is a natural part of all of our lives, both personally and at work. Internal relationships at work must be nurtured and maintained or chaos will erupt.

In order to understand conflict in organizations and to learn how to properly manage it, one must first understand how conflict originates. According to McShane and Glinow (2008), there are six major sources of conflict in organizations. This paper will address four of these sources in detail. One of these sources of conflict involves the availability of resources. Windle and Warren point out that the scarcity of resources can be perceived or real (2008). With lean practices at work in most organizations today, resource scarcity is commonly a reality and can be a catalyst for much conflict.

Competition for needed resources arises among employees, and office politics take the helm. The most effective way to handle this issue is to be creative and flexible in finding solutions that address resources. Instead of expending energy in conflict, this energy can be channeled into finding solutions. If one is resistant to explore other possibilities only because the desired resources are not available, the organization cannot progress. Conflict involving scarce resources that is not resolved wastes even more resources as time is spent in the feuding process.

One of the common examples of resource scarcity in today's organization involves staffing. Many organizations are flattening their structures and working to achieve maximum efficiency with the employees remaining. Organizations are empowering employees so that the hierarchical structures of the past are not perceived as necessary. With these structural changes, conflict certainly can arise. Employees often feel excessive pressure to meet high demands and thus may believe that other employees are not contributing equally to the goals of the organization.

With empowered employees and fewer managers, the portals to resolve such conflict are limited in many organizations. Thus, employees are often left to resolve conflict amongst themselves. Even though the personal feedback solution might be an ideal solution, it is not an easy solution. Most employees who are on the same level find confronting a fellow employee about conflict difficult and uncomfortable. Collaboration is certainly one of the most effective ways to deal with such conflict, but unfortunately it is not always the first approach. Some employees avoid the issue or become combative.

Employees must find a way to communicate effectively so that the issue surrounding the scarce resources can be resolved. For example, there is a project that must be completed by a specific deadline, but the number of staff available for the project is limited. Of the four employees working on the project, two stay late every night to work and work at least one day per weekend to try to get the project completed on schedule. The other two employees leave every day after eight hours and never work on weekends. They never mention staying late or give any reason for not doing so.

The two employees who are staying late and working on weekends must find a way to communicate their dissatisfaction to the other two employees. The lack of communication from the beginning of the project brought about the conflict, and communication must rectify the conflict. The scarcity of resources, staff, was an underlying cause of the conflict in this situation, but ultimately, the lack of communication facilitated an even greater escalation of conflict. Proper identification of the cause of conflict is critical in its resolution. Communication problems can be a huge source of conflict in an organization.

A person's communication skills usually come from his or her culture. Miscommunication yields misunderstanding and can create conflict even where there are no basic incompatibilities (Fisher). Ineffective communication often results in confusion, hurt and anger, all of which simply feed the conflict process (Fisher). Good communication requires the parties at hand to be clear and respectful. Employees bring their communication skills to the organization in which they work, and if they are not careful, poor communication skills can result in conflicts. In a conflict caused by communication problem, one has to start from the beginning and evaluate where the situation evolved. In order to understand the root of a conflict caused by communication, one can look at the ingredients that went into the communication. Difference in perceptions causes parties in conflict not to see eye to eye. One's perception of a situation might be interpreted differently from another, which can cause the breakout of a conflict. If ten people read the same story and are asked to interpret it, most of them would

have a different perception of what happened or what the author was trying to state.

It is very easy to get the wrong perception of someone else's ideas. The difference in values is another ingredient that can initiate a communication conflict. Values are beliefs or principles that one considers to be important to him or her as an individual. A person's values might cause conflicts because the other party might not respect one's values. At work, one might have an issue with another co-worker because he or she expresses no values, and therefore does not appear to understand the other person's values. Such a conflict in values can cause a conflict of interest.

With diversity in today's organizations, values and culture go hand in hand. Communication differences due to diverse cultures can be a problem. Co-workers and managers have to be careful how they communicate with each other and seek to understand different cultures. Different feelings and emotions are another fuel for ineffective communication. Some people wear their heart on their sleeves and can easily become stressed in communication. In communicating with such individuals, being aware of their feelings is critical in communicating effectively.

Communicating when personal feelings or emotions are tapped can cause much conflict. Selecting the appropriate time and place to communicate with someone who has emotions involved is advisable. Conflicts can ignite because that person is going through something that has nothing to do with the party at hand. Our emotions can get us in trouble especially when they are expressed at the wrong time. The road to effective communication with

minimal conflict is highly individualized. Acquiring good communication skills is a lifelong process, but consistent efforts to excel in communication are essential in work relationships.

Regardless of titles, job descriptions, or education, everyone in an organization has to communicate. Active listening is a great communication tip and involves a person listening and seeking to understand what is being said before speaking. One should remain professional at all times even when he or she may be angry. Using the communication chain of command in an organization is also a great tip. Sometimes an employee might not want to follow this chain, but if the organization's policy dictates such, it is essential to follow the policy.

Respect for others is great value and goes a long way in achieving effective communication and minimizing conflict. Crucial conversations are very effective in preventing conflict in communication. A powerful dialogue needs to take place sometimes before, during, or after a conflict. Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, and Switzler emphasize that when the stakes are high, opinions vary, and emotions start to run strong, casual conversations become crucial (2002). They iterate that when we fail a crucial conversation, every aspect of our lives, including our careers, communities, relationships, and personal health, can be affected.

Crucial conversations are difficult to conduct when the stakes are high. Another recognizable source of conflict is goal incompatibility. McShane and Glinow (2008) state that " goal incompatibility occurs when personal or work goals seem to interfere with another person's or department's goals" (p.

273). For example, an individual or group may want to see seniority rewarded, while another individual or group may want to see work production rewarded. This disagreement is about which goal should be rewarded.

Conflict is to be anticipated when a diverse group of people come together with different work techniques, views, and interests that lead to incompatible goals. Lack of clarity on how to perform a job may initiate conflicts as well. Incompatible goals may cause people to become emotional, uncooperative, and argumentative about approaches. For instance, heroes arrive at work, expecting to make a difference by looking out for the best interest of the employee's and the organization. Zeroes arrive at work to perform a job eight hours a day and to receive a paycheck.

When heroes and zeroes come together in a workplace, one can see that there are incompatible goals in place. Incompatible goals affect pay, promotions, and overall feelings of loyalty towards the employer. In spite of goals viewed as similar or different, incompatible goals are perceived as fundamental to conflict initiation. Jaya states that there are three types of goal conflicts that occur when a goal has both positive and negative features or when an individual has two or more competing goals blocking one another (2008). First, approach-approach conflict occurs when the individual is attracted to equally desirable goals.

Second, approach-avoidance conflict occurs when one goal has both positive and negative aspects, and an individual is motivated to approach and avoid the goal at the same time. Approach-avoidance conflict brings to mind an

article by Carleen MacKay (2008). The article is in reference to the Japanese company Toyota and the American company Ford. Ford has spent the last 30 years moving its factories out of the United States, claiming they cannot make money paying American wages. Toyota spent the last 30 years building more than a dozen plants inside the United States.

As a result, Toyota has posted over four billion in profits, as reported last quarter, while Ford racked up nine billion in losses. The American company Ford has been experiencing conflict due to incompatible goals for the past 30 years. Third, avoidance??? avoidance conflict occurs when an individual is repulsed by two unattractive goals at the same time. Even though incompatible goals in an organization are normally viewed as negative, arguments from diverse opinions can enhance decision-making. To listen and be open-minded to new views is absolutely essential to the achievement of organizational goals.

Assigning tasks may also help to ease the unfairness of effort toward the goal. For example, there are slackers who do not put forth any effort and think that others in the group should take on his or her responsibilities. Incompatible goals can be addressed by representing each team member in the same way, recognizing the problem, and listening to each concern with a level of magnitude and respect. In order to achieve a mutual goal, each teammate or employee should respect others for his or her different opinions and objectives.

Dealing with a group conflict face-to-face can assists the team in discovering better solutions and developing strong relationships with trust in the long

run. Incompatible goals are noticeably transpired through communication from one group or individual to another group or individual in organizations. Another cause of conflict in organizations is the difference between people, places, and cultures. Every person has his or her own beliefs and values that are built from his or her own unique background and/or experiences.

Cultures are differentiated by several different factors: the value placed on the individual versus other people or groups, views of time and space, roles of men and women, concepts of class and status, values, language, rituals, the significance of work, and beliefs about health are some of them. These beliefs produce " norms" that will most often influence a person's behavior. Cultural diversity, especially during events like a company merger, makes it very difficult for people to accept the beliefs and values that others might hold toward the decisions made by an organization.

For example, in some cultures as a top level manager you would lose respect for asking a subordinate their opinion whereas in other cultures, it would to the benefit of top level management to include their employees in the decision-making process. Divergent corporate cultures often have employees fighting over who is doing it the " right" way and who is doing it " better". Aside from conflict generated from cultural diversity, companies are also experiences conflict between generations. Today more commonly than ever before, employees among different age groups are working together in the same organizations.

The conflict here falls on the fact that younger and older employees have different expectations, goals, and even beliefs and values. However

demanding and frustrating this might be, the bottom line is that the newer generation of employees bring a fresh approach and have what it takes for long-term success (Rock, 1999). Therefore, many organizations today are more inclined to hire generation-Xers without thinking of the changes it might cause to their culture and work environment. How is it possible to manage conflict that deals with cultural and corporate differences?

The best way is to reduce it by minimizing the amount of differences in the organization. This is done by making the employees feel as though they have more commonality between them. Implementing common experiences is a great option for an organization to think about. If every employee has done or has learned the same roles, he or she will be more motivated to work out his or her differences on his or her own. As a manager or leader in an organization dealing with cultural differentiation issues, becoming more aware of cultural differences, as well as exploring cultural similarities is very important.

In this generation, cultural diversity and cross-generational work environments are becoming more popular and more of a necessity when thinking of long-term success. Globalization is what every large corporation is looking for and working towards if they are not already in the market. " Diversity in the workplace is important because it contributes to organization decision making, effectiveness, and responsiveness. Organizations can benefit from experiences, insights, approaches, and values of diverse populations" (Supanwanid, 1999).

Embracing cultural diversity is the best approach when dealing with it and realizing all the benefits that it could bring. " A culturally diverse organization recognizes, supports, values, and utilizes people's differences and similarities in support of the organization's objectives" (Supanwanid, 1999). The world of technology and corporate interests are changing and with that will come differentiation of all sorts within any corporation. Accepting the changes instead of resisting them will make for a more successful career.

In conclusion, even though conflict in organizations is inevitable, the manner in which it is managed determines if the conflict ends on a positive or negative note. In order to know how to properly manage conflict, organizations must clearly identify the source of conflict and manage the source. When conflict is not properly identified, the conflict can escalate and cause even further conflicts. With organizations today working in such a highly competitive marketplace, timely, effective management of conflict is critical to their success. WORKS CITED Fisher, R. J.

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