

Conflicts: Their Types, And Their Negative And Positive Effects On Organizations

Abdul Fattah Farea Hussein, Yaser Hasan Salem Al-Mamary

Abstract: In the past, many researchers and writers thought that conflict has only negative and harm impact on the organization. Most of previous studies show only the negative view of Conflicts. This study aims to highlight the different types of conflicts, and shows positive and negative effects of conflict in organizations.

Index Terms: Types, Positive, Negative, Effects, Conflict, Organizations.

1 INTRODUCTION

In any environment, institution or organization, conflict cannot be avoided due to differences among individuals' ideas, desires, perceptions and needs. In general, conflict is defined as an antagonistic state of opposition, disagreement or incompatibility between two or more parties (Patzak, 2012 & Wilmont and Hocker, 2001). Conrad (1991) indicated that conflicts happen as a result of interactions among interdependent people who perceive that their interests are incompatible, inconsistent or in tension; Lewis Coser, (1956), an American sociologist, defined conflict as the clash of values and interests, the tension between that is and what some groups feel ought to be. Regarding this definition, conflict has the functions of pushing societies and leads to new economic systems, technologies, institutions; his contribution is that he determined the functional and dysfunctional roles that can be played by the conflict. Moreover, Robbins (2005) has defined conflict as a process that begins where one party perceives that another party has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect, something that the first party cares about. This definition emphasizes that conflict is about perceptions, not necessarily real hard facts. Differences among individuals including ideas, goals, and competition for resources can lead to conflict (Fleetwood & Karen L. 1987). There are other differences, particularly in the business world such as situation, environment, experience, personality and peer group; such characteristics cause differences in needs, values, beliefs and personal attitudes. In addition, conflict was defined by Hocker and Wilmontin (1985) as an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce rewards, and interference from the other party in achieving their goals (Borisoff & Victor, 1998).

2. TYPES OF CONFLICTS

Conflicts may occur within an individual (i.e. the situation of dilemma of choice, caught on the horns of dilemma or brightly characterized by phrases such as "between the devil and the deep blue sea". Between two individuals, conflicts can also happen (i.e. the cases of superiors versus subordinates. They can happen between heads of departments, etc. Within groups, conflicts may occur based on performance, importance to particular groups and, in general, union – management rivalries (Amason & Schweiger, 1994). As we know, conflicts have positive and negative results. Therefore, they must be handled well in order to bring benefits to the organization. For this end, managements must realize the situations in order to make a decision whether to inspire conflicts or to resolve them. 20% of managers' time is spent up in handling conflicts as reported by Thomas and Schmidt. Accordingly, there is an important need for the organization managements to determine the type of conflict and how to handle it. Therefore, standardized techniques can be suggested and devised in treating popular conflicts' characteristics in all categories (Chand, 2010). Conflict can be classified into types according to its levels, directions, organization and planned conflict (Kinicki & Kreitner, 2008; Green, 2012). Basic types of conflicts are:

2.1 Intrapersonal Conflict

This conflict occurs within the person himself; it arises within an individual when his motives or drives are block or when a person faces two different decisions and cannot take the appropriate decision as he faces competing objectives and roles (Chand, 2010). The conflict within the individual is usually related to value, where there is no conformity between his role and his values and beliefs (e.g. to avoid unwanted telephone calls or visitors, secretaries may sometimes lie that their managers are not in their offices. This could lead to conflicts within the secretaries' minds who may have improved a principle of telling truths (Chand, 2010). Moreover, it often includes some types of cognitive or goal conflicts. Goal conflicts exist within an individual when their behaviors and attitudes have compatible elements or lead to both positive and negative outcomes which are mutually exclusive. Some basic elements which causes conflicts within individuals include incompatibility, unacceptability, uncertainty, frustration, goal conflict and role conflict (Evans, 2013).

- Approach-approach conflict: this conflict arises when there are two or more alternatives with positive consequences. In this situation, a person has this choice between these alternatives that to be equally

-
- Abdul Fattah Farea Hussein, Open University Malaysia, Centre for Graduate Studies, Yemen Branch almosbahiabd2014@gmail.com
 - Yaser Hasan Salem Al-Mamary, University of Hail, College of Business Administration, Department of Management Information Systems, Hail, Saudi Arabia

attractive; (e.g. a person has the right to select one of two equally attractive jobs).

- Avoidance conflict: this conflict is “a situation in which a person has to select one of two or more alternatives with negative outcomes”, (e.g. when an employee is threatened with punishments regarding his demotion unless he does something he dislikes spending extra time travelling on his job).
- Approach-avoidance conflict: this conflict happens in a situation in which an individual should choose something with positive and negative results (e.g. the person chooses to accept a nice job in an undesired place). (Evans, 2013).

2.2 Interpersonal Conflict

It is probably the most recognized and popular conflict which arises between two or more individuals. This is what most people associate as “conflict” in an organization, and it can happen because of differences that occur between two people (Green & Charles 2012). This conflict may happen between two managers who compete for a limited manpower and capital resource or compete for the same promotion; further they may disagree over the best marketing plan for their top client. Moreover, this conflict may take place between the manager and his bosses, supervisor and worker or between worker and worker, etc. moreover, it may happen because of the differences over the objectives and goals of organizations (Kinicki & Kreitner 2008). The causes that lead to this conflict are personality differences, perceptions (experiences, education, backgrounds and education), clashes of values and interests, power and status differences, lack of information, role in compatibility, stress and scarce resources (Whetten & Cameron, 2012).

2.3 Intragroup Conflict

It happens when a person in a group works to achieve a different goal than the other group in the organization. This conflict happens at the organizational level (Barki & Hartwick 2004) It is normal that all groups, both formal and informal, tend to establish particular operational standards and behavioural principles which are adhered to by all members of the groups. A member may have social needs that oblige him to stay within his group, but simultaneously he may not agree with his group's goals and the ways required achieving such goals. Such conflicts may also happen between leaders with their followers or between managers and groups of subordinates. Managers or leaders may take disciplinary actions toward group members, thus leading to conflicts with the group, which subsequently causes a decrease in the entire productivity of the organization. Intra-group conflict may also happen if there are disagreements among members of the same group (Chand, 2015). Most researchers have identified three forms of intra-group conflict: relationship, task and process conflict (Amason, 1994; Jehn, 1995; Pinkley, 1990). However, there are conceptual and considerable overlaps between the three forms of intra-group conflict (Dirks & Parks, 2003). A relationship conflict exists in case members of a group have interpersonal incompatibilities such as tensions, animosities, annoyances and personality clashes (Jehn, 1995). Moreover, negative individual emotions is produced by this conflict. Some of the seen emotions are resentments, anxieties or mistrusts (Jehn, 1995), frustrations, tensions, and fears of being unexpected by members of other groups

(Murnighan & Conlon, 1991). A task conflict: it happens when there are differences regarding contents of tasks and goals of works, including facts' interpretation, resources' distribution and procedures (Jehn, 1995). A task conflict includes disagreements in opinions, viewpoints and ideas, and may match with personal excitations and active discussions. Process conflicts refer to disagreements about the method in which a task should be achieved.

2.4 Intergroup Conflict

Conflicts arise between different groups in an organization each seeking to accomplish their objectives, are called intergroup conflicts. Organizations are composed of interlocking networks of sections, work teams, departments, individuals, departments or groups. The individuals tend to form various groups when there is a demand for that (Green, 2012). Since conflicts happen because of inherent factors in the structure of organizations. Therefore, the intergroup conflict may not be too much naturally personal. For example, there are continuous and vital conflicts among the managements and unions. The conflict between line and staff organizations is one of the most popular conflicts (Kinicki & Kreitner, 2008). These conflicts may be happened by the absence of mutual decision making, rivalries in resources, and differences in goals or perceptions, misunderstanding, competitions and a set of boundaries by team members to others which establish their identities as a team. Conflicts arise among different functional groups inside the organization due to their different objectives and due to several fundamental differences between various units of an organization within its operations, processes or structures. As each unit works to develop its own organizational sub-structure, these sub-structures are different in terms of goal and time orientation, formality of structure and supervisory style (Jones & Gareth & George and Jennifer, 2008). Likewise, intergroup conflicts may happen among workers of day shifts and night shifts when one of them blames the other in case of missing equipment, a maintenance problem, etc. (Evans, 2005). The harmony among all interdependent groups is considered as an essential factor for the organization success as a whole. When the management study the intergroup behaviours within an organization, it can recognize any conflict and deal with it (Kinicki & Kreitner, 2008).

2.5 Intra-Organizational Conflict

Intra-Organizational conflict has four types including vertical conflict, horizontal conflict, line-staff conflict and role conflict. They have distinctive features; however, they can overlap, particularly with the role one (Luthans, 1998) Vertical conflicts arise among the organizational levels (e.g. the superior-subordinate conflicts). They often happen due to attempts of superiors to control while horizontal conflicts happen among departments or staff with the similar organizational hierarchical levels (Jones & George, 2008). In addition, line-staff conflict as line departments are assisted by staff departments in most organizations. The relationship between line and staff departments often creates conflicts. Usually, line and staff managers have distinct personal characteristics. Unlike line employees, staff employees are younger and likely to acquire higher educational levels coming from several backgrounds. Such distinct personal characteristics are often based on distinct beliefs, ethics and values; the surfacing of which may create conflicts (Kinicki & Kreitner, 2008). Role Conflicts: Roles

are sets of actions that are expected to be performed by individuals in their positions.

2.6 Inter-organizational conflicts

Inter-organizational conflicts happen between organizations which to some extent depend on each other. All conflicts inherent in organization levels involve the conflicts that occur at individual levels or group levels, (e.g. conflicts arouse between a buyer organization and a supplier one about policy issues, delivery times, quality, quantity, etc. or between a government agency which regulates particular organizations and organizations which are influenced by this agency or between the workers' unions and their organizations (Jones & George, 2008).

3. EFFECTS OF CONFLICT

In the past, many researchers and writers thought that conflict has only negative and harm impact on the organization, particularly its productivity and performance (Kinicki & Kreitner, 2008). In this regard, according to Traditional View (1930-1940), which is one school of thought, conflicts should be avoided as they reflect malefactions within groups. Conflicts are viewed negatively and are related to destructions and violence. But with the appearance of the human relations or Contemporary View (1940-1970), this perception is changed; According to Contemporary View, conflict is "a natural occurrence in all groups". The human relations schools accept conflicts. They believe that conflicts may help performance of groups (Robbins, 2005). Another view was by Rahim (1986) who suggested that whether the conflict's effects are positive or negative, they depend on the strategy utilized to handle them. Based on the above –mentioned views, conflicts negatively affect organizations in respect with wastages of scarce resources and performances. Similarly, conflicts do not positively affect organizations particularly in elevating and developing the innovativeness the decisions' quality in the organizations. In addition, when employees come together to resolve these conflicts, this builds spirits of cooperation and teamwork among members in the organizations (Rahim, 1986; Robbins, 2005). Employees and management should work together in order to accomplish positive effects instead of negative ones in spite that conflicts have both of them.

3.1 Negative Effects of Conflict

The following is a short list of the negative effects of a conflict within individuals: (Amason, 1996; Dana 2001 et al..)

A. Psychological Responses

- Absentmindedness to other things.
- Lack of interests to work.
- Job dissatisfactions
- Work distresses
- Estrangements or alienations from others
- Disappointments.

B. Behavioral Responses:

Conflict may enforce the individual to behave in unusual matter such as, excessive smoking, drinking alcohol, be hostile towards others, decrease his communication with others and resist influence attempts. Dana (2001) provided a comprehensive list of the costs of conflict:

- Wasting of time: Conflicts affect individual and organizational performance, management spent much

time and energy for resolving conflict; this time is supposed to be spent for more productivity.

- Employees leave the organization: Leaving the organization: Members of organizations unsatisfied with the conflicts' levels in their organizations may have a decision to leave their work. Particularly, it is harmful in case those members are parts of the heads of committees or executive boards. Recruiting new members and appointing acting board members are two duties of the organization when those members start to end their memberships. The organization risks dissolution as an extreme case, where an executive board member leave or many members step down.
- Sabotage, theft and damage: Conflicts may cause sabotages at work, morale problems in employees, decline in the market share of service/product and consequently losing productivity. Moreover, in case organizations spend much of their times handling conflicts, employees may not focus on the important goals they should achieve. Conflicts cause members to vent about frustrations, concentrate more on gossiping about conflicts and less on projects at their hands. Therefore, organizations lose accesses to essential resources, money and donors.
- Health costs: Conflicts can cause "collective traumas," which causes "chosen trauma" and can be moved to future generations in the form of resentment against one's ancestors' enemies. Chosen trauma gives rise to group identity and keeps the flame of conflict burning; moreover, Individual may be affected emotionally and physically by intense conflicts over a prolonged period and such conflict may lead to psychosomatic disorders.
- In a conflict situation, an individual may tend to achieve and promote his self-interest or personal gain at the cost of the organization or others.
- Taking bad decisions and tending to unnecessary restructuring;
- lack of job motivation or low motivation
- Conflicts can disturb groups and people from their essential goals, diverting them to time and resources away from other important purposes. When conflicts include the use of "heavy contentious tactics," they can causes the groups or people involved or not involved in the conflicts to leave them to less time and resources.

3.2 Positive effects of Conflict

Conflict has several benefits including the following:

1. It stimulates individuals to exert more efforts and to work hard. In a conflict situation the individual uses his abilities, skills and talents.
2. It may satisfy particular psychological requirements such as dominances, aggressions, esteems and egos, and accordingly gives chances for constructive uses and releases of aggressive urges.
3. It gives productive and creative ideas. For instance, the benefits that employees receive nowadays are the outcomes of the management-union conflicts during the last decades.
4. Conflicts that contribute to social changes which ensure intergroup and interpersonal dynamics remain fresh and reflective of recent realities and interests, in the sense that it adds varieties to individual's organizational lives. Instead, work lives would be boring and tedious.

5. It facilitates mutual understandings of the problems among individuals in conflicts and causes better coordination among managements and people. Moreover, it strengthens intra-group relationships and unities by allowing outlets for members of groups to argue and debate their needs in the groups. The group health usually declines without intra-group conflicts.
6. Conflicts among groups create units between the groups and increase cooperation as they are working to achieve popular goals of the groups for the outcomes of these conflicts.
7. Inspire creativity: -conflicts are exploited by several organizations as a chance to look for effective solutions to problems. Members can also be inspired by conflicts for brainstorming, whereas considering problems from different perspectives.
8. Share and Respect Opinions: -it is an opportunity for members of organization to contribute their viewpoints with individuals of other groups. Conflicts can bring members of the organization together to actively listen to each other and share views and experiences as they work to achieve the organizational objectives; in the sense that conflict is a tool for improving future communication and can provide members with the tools necessary to easily solve conflicts in the future.
9. Conflicts serve to discourage premature group decision making. In the processes of making decisions, this forces participants to discover the needs and issues when they are sought.
10. Conflicts allow for the understanding of the concerns of parties, causing agreements that benefit the interests of both parties with their organizations and relationships.

4. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the six basic types of conflicts including intergroup conflict, Intra-Organizational conflict, Inter-Organizational conflict, interpersonal conflict, intrapersonal conflict and intra-group conflict. In addition, the study shows that while people focus on the negative effects of conflict, it has also positive effects if it is exploited properly and managed well by the organization; for instance, it stimulates individuals to exert more efforts, it creates productive and creative ideas and contributes to social changesetc.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Amason, A.C. (1996), Distinguishing the Effects of Functional and Dysfunctional Conflict on Strategies Decision-making: Resolving a Paradox for Top Management Groups. *Academy of Management Journal*, 39, 123-148
- [2]. Amason, A.C. & Schweiger, D.M. (1994). Resolving the paradox of conflict, strategic decision making, and organizational performance. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 5, 239-253.
- [3]. Barki, Hahartwick, J. (2004). Conceptualizing the Construct of Interpersonal Conflict. *International Journal of Conflict Management* 15 (3), 216-244.
- [4]. Borisoff, D. & Victor, D.A. (1998). *Conflict Management: A Communication Skills Approach*. Needham Heights: Allyn & Bacon, A Viacom Company, 78-80.
- [5]. Chand, S., 2010, *Management*.
- [6]. Conrad, C (1991). *Communication in conflict: Style-* strategy relationships. *Communication Monographs*, 58: 135-155.
- [7]. Dana, D, (2001). *Conflict resolution: Mediation tools for everyday worklife*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- [8]. Dirks, K. T. & Parks, J. M. (2003). *Conflicting stories: The state of the science of conflict*. In J.Greenberg (Ed.), *Organizational Behavior: The State of the Science*, 283-324.
- [9]. Evans, B. (2013): *Management of Conflict*.
- [10]. Evans, M. (2005). *On the job: nurses reveal most, least enjoyable aspects of work*.
- [11]. Fleetwood, Karen L. (1987). *The Conflict Management Styles and Strategies of Educational Managers*. Unpublished master's thesis, University of Delaware, Newark.
- [12]. Green, Charles (2012). *Examples of Four Types of Conflict*. Human Resources.
- [13]. Hocker, J.I & W.W. Wilmot (1985). *Interpersonal Conflict* Dubuque, IOWA: Wmc. Brown Publisher.
- [14]. Jones, Gareth R., George, Jennifer M. (2008). *Contemporary Management*. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies.
- [15]. Jehn, K. (1995). A multimethod examination of the benefits and detriments on intragroup conflict. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 40, 256-282.
- [16]. Kinicki, A., & Kreitner, R. (2008). *Organizational Behavior: Key Concepts, Skills & Best Practices*. New York: The McGraw - Hill Companies, 16- 17.
- [17]. Luthans F, (1998) *Organizational Behavior*, IRWIN/McGRAW-HILL.
- [18]. Lewis, Coser (1956). *The Functions of Conflict*. New York: Routledge and Kogan Paul.
- [19]. Murnighan, J.K. & Conlon, D.E. (1991). The dynamics of intense work groups: A study of British string quartets. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 36, 165-186.
- [20]. Patzak, R., (2012) *Project Management: Guidelines for the Management of Projects, Project Portfolios, Programs and Project-Oriented Companies*. Linde International.
- [21]. Pinkley, R. L. (1990). Dimensions of conflict frame: Disputant interpretations of conflict. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 75, 117-126.
- [22]. Robbins, S. P. (2005). *Essentials of organizational behavior*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- [23]. Rahim, M.A (1986). Referent Roles and styles of Handling Interpersonal Conflict. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 125, 79-86.
- [24]. Whetten, David A., & Cameron, Kim S. (2012). *Managing Power and Conflict in the Workplace*. Introduction to International Organizational Behavior.
- [25]. Wilmont, W. W., & Hocker, J. L. (2001). *Interpersonal conflict*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill