

Political power, control and organizational conflict

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ABSTRACT

There used to be an assumption that any conflict has negative and destructive influences and we must remove it from the system. However, recent studies indicate that conflict is the result of interaction with different people having various personalities, social and cultural behaviors and this is an unavoidable issue. The existence of conflict is not necessarily a bad thing; in fact, there are many evidences, which show that organizations with no conflict may fail. In other words, people who work for business units with no conflict are most likely so disparate that they cannot fit themselves to environmental conditions. In this paper, we discuss how to handle a conflict in any organization and lead the business units to organizations that are more productive.

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1. Introduction

Conflict is a phenomenon, which has positive and negative effects on people and organizations' function. Accurate and effective usage of conflict brings about improvement of function and health level of organization and ineffective usage of it causes reduction of function and fulfillment of challenges in organization. Effective usage of conflict necessitates recognition and complete perception of its nature; in addition, it is the reason of creator and skill achievement in administration and control being today accounted as one of the most important skills of management.

Ability of encountering with conflict and its administrating plays significant role in success of organizations' managers. If conflict influences positively, it can create new thoughts and inventions and by providing fields of informative changes and evolution. It could also help management teams reach their organizational goals and objectives. In this article, we explain the concept of power, control and conflict, recognizing skills of conflict management and explain the necessity of its usage by managers (Daft, 2001; Handy, 1993).

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2. Concept of Conflict

There are literally different definitions for the concept of conflict; it can mean bothering someone on some disagreement. It can be a process where someone deliberately attempts to prevent the other person from achieving his/her aims and interests. According to this definition, concepts of recognition, disagreement, awareness, scarcity and deterrence describe the nature of conflict. Other common cases of conflict definitions are difference, scuffle, challenge, violence and disorder.

2.1. Steps of opposition and conflict

There are literally four stages in any conflict: the first stage is associated with the potential disagreement. There are feedbacks in conflict where one of them is communications. If there is insufficient agreement in the process of communications, we may reach to some disagreement and conflict. The second stage is associated with recognition and perception. For instance, when someone learns that the other person disagrees with him/her, he/she will recognize that this person may have some conflict. There are cases where someone does not disclose his/her feeling on disagreement but he/she behaves differently and this feeling is another form of conflict. There are some interdependencies between these two forms of conflicts. Note that when conflict comes with another party's cooperation, it is called behavior. Finally, the fourth stage is associated with understanding the behavior of function of conflict (Robins, 1974).

2.2. Different types of organizational conflicts

2.2.1. Conflicts according to conflict opponents

It is a type of conflict based on conflict opponents in organization. Six types of conflict are appeared in organizations on this basis including intrapersonal conflict, middle personal conflict, inter group conflict, middle group conflict, conflict between organizations, conflict between people and groups (Robins, 1974).

2.2.2. Constructive conflict versus destroyer conflict

There is another kind of conflict, which has more popularity among different kinds of conflict and is divided into two types of constructive and destroyer conflicts. According to this classification, cooperative conflicts are good and could support organizational objectives but some others prevent from getting organizational objectives called destroyer conflict.

No level of conflict can be acceptable or rejected in all situations. It is possible that one kind or a number of conflicts increase health and achievement of organizational aims in one situation called constructive conflict.

However, the same conflict could to be very destroyer in another organization, or in the same organization and another time. Criteria of distinguishing constructive or destroyer conflict are functions of organization. By utilizing the concept of conflict management, nature and function of conflict appear in organizations where conflict management means minimization of destroyer power of conflict and turning conflict as an effective, constructive and creative phenomenon.

Conflict can be constructive and it can improve quality of decisions, invention of function and creation, curiosity and intensification of group members' interest to each other, and strengthen atmosphere, environment of judgment system and phenomenon of revolution.

In addition, there are different kinds of conflict, which are as follows,

A) Vertical conflict: it occurs between hierarchy ranks and includes disagreement of inferior on resources, aims, deadlines and results of function.

B) Horizontal conflict: it occurs among people and groups of an organizational level and includes the lack of continuity and consistency on aims, lack of resources and relative factors of people's relations.

C) Conflict of line and headquarters: it occurs among line and headquarters officers and includes generally disagreement about who disposes and controls special matters like selection of personals and relative proceedings of ending active service.

D) Conflict of role: it occurs while occupational expectations were indefinite, incomplete or uncomfortable and involves usually suspect of expectations, increasing or decreasing expectations or lack of consistency of expectations (Robins, 1974; Pfeffer, 1997).

2.3. Assessment of organizational conflict origin

The first step on handling any conflict is to find the origin of problem since conflicts are not created by themselves and once the origin is detected, it is easier to handle the case (Argyris & Schön, 1978). There are three main reasons for having any conflict, which are discussed in the following section.

2.3.1. Personal disagreements (personal differences)

The first reason of having conflict is personal differences or personal disagreements. Conflict can be resulted from people's moral and behavioral characteristics. There are various factors such as educations, occupational resume, job experience, etc. which are different from one person to another and they can be the original source of troubles. If there is a lack of perception among people based on these characteristics, organization may face negative attitudes (Hatch, 1997).

2.3.2. Structural disagreements

Structural disagreements happens when there is a lack of coherence and unification among organizational units and occurs while there is no agreement on organizational aims, decision makings, criteria of function, specialization of resources, roles, principles, methods and procedures. These issues could create conflict in organization, for instance, if an organization selects inconsistency aims, personals do not know which direction or aim they should choose (Hardy & Clegg, 1996).

2.3.3. Communicative disagreements

Communicative disagreements are lack of agreements, which are resulted from complexity of meaning science, lack of message perception and difference in communication. Generally, intrapersonal conflicts are resulted from weak of communication, but interpersonal and inter group conflicts are resulted from differences in expectations of organizational roles, characteristics and values of system or common factors, which are the reason of increasing communication, where these communications are not possibly effective and faithful relations (Hardy & Clegg, 1996).

3. Conflict Management

There are literally various factors, which could be used to manage conflict, resolve the issues or reduce the consequences of any conflict. Management team could use elusion strategy, strengthening collaborations among employee, creating field of participation, utilizing strategy of consistency, and preparing appropriate instructions of unification to reduce negative influences of conflicts (Bazaz Jazaieri, 2004).

3.1. Strategy of constructive conflict generation in organization

The first step in building constructive conflict in organizations is to change the existing culture. This change could happen by sending appropriate message to inferiors where conflict has legal position in organization and is supported. If this culture is accomplished, employees can express their ideas and opinions without any fear. Manger of organizations can understand new thoughts and use them in their decisions. This culture can be improved through wage increase, awards and other positive mechanisms (Scott, 1995). Scott (1995) explained that it is possible to use employees out of organization to fulfill constructive conflict in organization, where their experiences, resumes, values, behaviors are different from inside the organization.

Another alternative solution on resolving conflicts is to consider organizational structure. As mentioned earlier, structural variables such as goals, roles and objectives, methods, procedures, circulars are some of origins of conflict. Hence, it is logical that managers consider structure as an instrument for conflict attitude. Centered decision making, determination of occupational groups, increase of formulization, increase of the numbers of parts between various segments of organizations are some of the steps, which could help resolve many conflicts (Senge, 1990).

3.2. Creative conflict implementation

Conflict normally depends on organizational management and way of encountering with conflict in an innovative and constructive direction. In organizations, conflict can be created between one person with another, between a person with a group of people, among members of a group in an organization and between two organizations. However, it is important that conflict could be controlled so that neither much trouble occurs in origination nor dictatorial form arises in organization. Conflict management recommends to encounter with different situations and use conflict for fulfilling positive changes (Pammer, 2003).

Effecting way of conflict on organization is associated with status of management response with this phenomenon. It demonstrates response against conflict with two ways as follows,

3.2.1. Negative response

If a manager receives negative response on a conflict, it may mean he/she does not think to resolve the issue. There are various factors, which lead to negative responses such as using and solving the conflict by applying ineffective methods for solving it, bad culture with terrorization, disagreement and threat are created in which its important characteristic is winning and defeating situation in organization (Pammer, 2003).

3.2.2. Positive response

When the response to manager is positive and effective against conflict, it means manager thinks to solve and use effective methods for solving the conflict; collaboration culture is created to strengthen organizational health (Pammer, 2003).

3.3. Constructive resultants of conflict

Conflict is constructive in some cases improving the quality of decision and solutions, bringing about innovation and inventiveness, creating curiosity and intensification of group members' interests to each other and solving matters, reducing mental pressures and intragroup tensions and finally strengthening evolution phenomenon (Amirkabiri, 1995).

Constructive role of conflict is very effective in the following cases:

1. Conflict as a changing factor: Based on theory of open system, conflict in organization is one of clearest powers to make the necessary changes within the organization, because conflicts encounter with existent situation and accelerates creation of new ideas.
2. Role of conflict in improving quality of decision: there are different evidences indicating that conflict could be effective in improving quality of decisions, thereby it permits to consider all points in important decisions.
3. Reformation or modification of objectives: Management can define different goals and conflict is consequently reformed or modified. There are many cases where a small change in management objectives could make tremendous change on the system.
4. Conflict as a power of stimulation and energetic: Conflict is an effective and functional method, which makes it possible to provide numerous stimulation and attitude among members of organizations. Conflict can prepare and mobilize people for necessary actions and it can increase existing attitude and energy for fulfilling tasks being established by social system (Soltani, 2009). The consequence of a conflict could be in four different scenarios as follows,

Situation 1: Loss-Loss scenario: In this case, two parties cannot find a concession.

Situation 2: Lose-Win scenario: In this case, one side of the conflict is a loser and the other side is winner.

Situation 3: Win-Lose scenario: This is the same as the previous one where one is the winner.

Situation 4: Win-Win scenario: In this scenario, two parties feel happy about the outcome of an incident.

It is always possible to reduce the burden of conflict consequences by turning all three scenarios into the last one, which is a win-win scenario.

4. Collaboration Model

Collaboration model is a model where most of theorists of management agree about its effectiveness and desirability. Energy and innovation are utilized for solving problems instead of disagreeing and encountering against each other. Hence, this method assesses reason and origins of conflict to solve it (Pfeffer, 1992; Pammer, 2003). The most important advantages of fulfilling collaboration model are briefly explained in this section.

4.1. Focus of group on production

Members of group try not to waste their times for providing individual objectives. While cooperation is strengthened, its members are not required to attend in preparing all aims of organization and follow to exchange more resources and information and advancement in works.

4.2. Group integration and satisfaction

While cooperation model is created in organization, employees know organization as their reference. Members contribute to organization and satisfy to be member in there.

4.3. Providing Organizational Goals

An organization fulfilling cooperation model, achieve its objectives. Because it does not waste its energy for solving conflicts of two parts' encountering and standing against other organizations.

4.4. Creativity and Innovation

Cooperation causes innovation and invention and helps to provide new production, technology and services (Izadi Yazdanpanah, 2001).

5. Organizational performance on the basis of collaboration model

There are many evidences confirming that solution based on collaboration model is the most satisfied and effective approach for encountering with conflict phenomenon. A successful collaboration model follows positive and constructive results for two parts and organization. This model increases efficiency and productivity, amount of two parts' obligation and motivation for accomplishing bigger risks in future. Managers following this model interfere directly and clearly to solve existent conflict among people, two parts confront and mention their conflict and provide a situation to assess apparently. In this model, manager allows his inferiors to tell their ideas about disagreed matter and to discuss to get a result and agreement (Robins, 1983).

5.1. Reasons of managers' refusal from collaboration

More managers fear from collaboration model and try to avoid it since collaboration model may cause to restrict the power and authority. However, managers could consider that collaboration model keeps their authority to take only necessary decisions. Collaboration model does not reduce manager's power and it can increase his power and authority in organization and it can enlarge his acceptance among organizational groups. In addition, people feel probably more heartfelt feeling besides organizational aims achievement (Daft, 2001; Pfeffer, 1981; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1974).

6. Education and Its Role in Conflict Reduction

One of the most important efforts on reducing any negative conflict and unwanted events is to increase employees' educational backgrounds. Any increase in the necessary skills required by organizations could help establishing better environment for understanding people's ideas. These educations should involve procedure of politics, and total objectives of organization about conflict and necessary skills employees required. These educations are usable and experimental, meaning that people are disposed these educations, should experiment successful solution of conflict in organization. Researches have shown that most of successful organizations consider these educations obligatory for their employees (Robins, 1974). After passing these educations, people who proved their ability and interests should continue advanced educations to serve as experienced experts to resolve conflicts. On the other side, managers of organizations should understand that all employees should gain skills of successful solutions of conflict as a part of their occupations (Daft, 2001).

7. Conclusion

If organization could follow collaboration model in addition to educating conflict solutions, most of conflicts can be directly solved. Employees can learn necessary educations, management of organization could use win-win conflict strategies through collaboration approaches. If two parts could not solve their conflict, they could use specialized experts having been educated in this field. Therefore, origination possesses a systematic process to solve conflict and can knowledgeably encounter with conflict and use it as a positive and constructive power to reach their objectives.

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