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CONFLICT MANAGEMENT WITHIN ORGANIZATIONS

Cpt.cdor. ing. Dan DOBRE

Romanian Air Force Headquarters / Bucharest / Romania

Abstract:

Every organization wants to be performant and to reach its goals, thus the members of the organization should have the same vision about what they are must achieve and the objectives must be clear for each individual and department. In order to do so, there should be found ways of recognizing and resolving conflict between people before this situation might become too serious to affect cooperation.

Key words: Conflict, management, competition, conciliation, negotiation, arbitration

1.Introduction

Any organization wants to achieve goals, which means that the members of the organization have the same vision about what they are determined to achieve and the objectives are clear for each individual and department. In order to do so, there should be found ways of recognizing and resolving conflict between people, so that conflict does not become too serious to affect cooperation. All members of an organization want to keep conflicts to a very low level, to solve problems caused by any potential conflict, not to let any conflict to become an obstacle in your work. This situation exists in any kind of organization, private business or government, political party or non-governmental organization.

Conflict management can be defined as a way of planning to keep away the organization from conflicts when possible and resolving conflicts where they do happen, as rapidly and smoothly as possible.

2. Competition and Conflict

A “conflict” is not similar with a “competition”. A “competition” usually brings out what is best in people, as they struggle to be the best in their activity domain, whether in sport, work or politics. In fact, fair-play competition leads to new achievements in sport, inventions in scientific domains or exceptional efforts to solve a community problem. If the competition becomes unfair, a conflict can appear - and this can bring out what is worst in people.

a. Common causes of conflict

Organizational conflict can have many and varied causes or sources. The most common causes are:

- lack of resources (any kind of resources: material, informational or financial);
- different attitudes or values;

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- divergences in needs, goals, priorities and interests;
- poor communication;
- inadequate structure;
- no teamwork;
- ambiguous responsibilities.

b. Conflict between individuals

People have different styles of communication, their own ambitions, personal political or religious views and very different cultural backgrounds. In our diverse society, there is always a possibility that these differences lead to a conflict between individuals, so we must be aware of this to prevent situations where conflict could arise.

c. Conflict among groups of people

When people form groups, they have a tendency to highlight the things that make their group “special”, “better” or “different” than other groups. This is possible in any domain: sports, works or politics, at any level of a group, and it can transform a fair competition into a destructive conflict.

d. Conflict inside a group of people

Inside an organization or team, a conflict might appear because of the individual differences, like a conflict between people; or because of the competition between factions or sub-groups, similar with the conflict between groups of people. It is the leaders’ and organization members’ job to be aware of the dynamics of the group that can overrun into conflict.

3. Signs and Stages of a Conflict

There are two main types of disputes, which occur especially at the workplace, but they could be noticed in many other situations. These two types are:

- ***rights disputes***: happen when individuals or groups of people are entitled by law or different regulations and acts, like a contract or agreement, to have certain rights. These disputes are usually focused on issues related to employment contracts, legal problems or changes made by one part of an agreement in accepted practices or customary ones. This kind of dispute cannot be solved through negotiation, so usually it is settled by a decision, a legal one or by arbitration.
- ***interest disputes***: happen where the conflict is a matter of opinion, when a person or a group of people is entitled to have access to a specific kind of resources or privileges (ex. the access to property or better working conditions), and there is no law to establish this. This kind of dispute is usually settled by negotiation or by collective bargain.

a. Stages of a conflict

To handle a conflict means to be aware of its various stages of development. It depends on leaders to identify a conflict issue and to find how far it has developed in order to solve the conflict before it becomes too serious. The typical stages of conflict are as follows:

- ***potential conflict***: potential for conflict exists because of the lack of resources, of a common language or because of the diversity of culture, and it may turn

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into conflict if the people involved are not willing to accept the existing diversity;

- ***latent conflict***: a particular situation, which involves competition, could degenerate into a real conflict, at the workplace, at a political meeting etc. where there are clear differences of opinion among the groups of people.
- ***open conflict***: a minor incident can turn suddenly into a real conflict.
- ***aftermath conflict***: when a specific problem looks like it has been resolved but the potential for conflict still exists. Actually, the potential of conflict may be even greater than before, if a person or a group of people think that they are involved in a confrontation, a win-or-loose situation.

b. Signs of conflict among individuals

Both leaders and organization members should be aware and should pay attention to the signs of conflict between colleagues, in order to be ready to act to reduce the conflict or even to resolve it by getting straight to the core of the issue. Typical signs of conflict may include attitudes like these:

- avoiding or not speaking to one another;
- arguing or contradicting one another;
- intentionally being non cooperative with others to the loss of the team.

c. Signs of Conflict Among Groups of People

Similarly with conflict among individuals, leaders and organizations' members should be aware at latent conflicts among factions or groups of people and if a conflict situation occurs, they should react before conflicts degenerate and become open and destructive:

- group meeting to discuss issues separately, even if they affect the entire organization;
- one group being ignored by the others when organizing an event which should include everyone;
- groups using aggressive slogans or symbols to demonstrate that they are right and the others are wrong.

4. Teamwork and cooperation

Any organization wants to be effective and to work efficiently, that's why teamwork and cooperation are essential in an organization. One way for building teamwork is to have a similar goal that means that not only leaders but also organization members are dedicated to the same objectives and they all are aware of their responsibilities in reaching those objectives. To achieve teamwork and to minimize potential conflict, team members have to:

- share information with each other, to keep everyone in the group up to date;
- show good expectations about their colleagues from the organization;
- empower and encourage one another to achieve their goals;
- work like a team, encourage morale and protect the reputation of the group;
- detect and reduce any potential conflict determined by the differences between people.

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5. Managing and Resolving Conflict Situations

a. Collective bargaining

Because some groups may be antagonistic, it is necessary to have an agreed mechanism to discuss and resolve any situation. This process is named “collective bargaining” because representatives of every group work together to find out a collective solution. The practice has shown that this approach could go to a generally agreed solution, occurred in a democratic process, where groups of people have to find ways to cooperate within their organization according to their agreed rules and procedures.

b. Conciliation

The definition of the conciliation is “the act of procuring good will or inducing a friendly feeling”[1]. The labor’s legislation from South Africa states that, for the conciliation process in the workplace, where there are groups in conflict unable to reach to a common solution, they can come once again to try to resolve their differences [2]. Workers usually attempt this before making other steps to a strike or before taking a lockout by management and it has become more useful to have a facilitator involved in the conciliation process. In the same way, any other organization should try first to reach conciliation.

c. Negotiation, mediation and arbitration

There are three methods of resolving situations when the stage of open conflict has been reached:

- ***Negotiation:*** this is a process where the authorized representatives of groups in a conflict situation are encountered in trying to resolve their differences and to reach an agreement. This process is planned and it is performed by the representatives of groups, in order to reconcile the differences between the groups and to reach agreements by consensus. The result is often dependent on the power relationship among the groups. A negotiation often means compromise – every group has to reduce or give up one of their demands in order to succeed in another. Negotiations are used to solve conflicts on a large scale, in workplaces, political and community groups.
- ***Mediation:*** when negotiations fail or cannot go further, parties often call for an independent mediator. The mediator will try to facilitate an agreement between the parties involved in the conflict. This mediator plays an important role in the process, he is an advisor for all groups, acts like a conciliator and makes suggestions for possible solutions for the conflict situation. In mediation, mediators are only advisors, they have no decision power and cannot force the conflicting parties to resolve the conflict. Mediators must be skilled and able to gain the conflicting individuals’ trust and confidence.
- ***Arbitration:*** means that an independent person acts as an adjudicator or judge in a conflict, and decides on the terms of the agreement. All parties in a conflict situation agree on the person of the arbitrator, and that the decision that will be taken by the arbitrator will be obligatory for all of them. Arbitration is neither the same with mediation nor with negotiation. It does not encourage the continuation of collective bargaining, the arbitrator just listens carefully and investigates the demands and counter-demands of the parties and plays the role of the decision-maker. Organizations and people from organizations can decide

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to have a single arbitrator or more arbitrators to whom they owe respect and whose decision they have to accept as final, if they want to solve the conflict.

d. An effective mediator

An effective mediator means a person with certain skills, capable to achieve credibility of the conflict parties and to obtain results in mediation act. He must have:

- a demonstrated rate of success in mediation or negotiation activities;
- the ability to achieve the trust, acceptance and cooperation of conflicting parties;
- a clear judgment in identifying the real problems and in offering useful solutions;
- knowledge about the structure of the organization, about the conflicting parties, and about applicable laws;
- diplomatic skills, but with the necessary power to persuade and strong character to nudge the participants towards an agreement.

e. The mediation process

The mediation process can be divided in three phases:

Phase 1: Introduction and establishment of credibility

In this first phase, the mediator has only a passive role. His main task is to make the conflicting parties to trust and accept him, to think that he is able to assist them fairly, and to make them believe that they can rely on him. An good mediator must leave the discussion to the conflict parties, but listens carefully and asks proper questions to identify the origins of the dispute and to highlight a possible settlement of the dispute. Once the mediator achieved trust, credibility, and having enough background knowledge, he can persuade the conflict parties to continue the negotiations, possibly with a new perspective to obtain an agreement.

Phase 2: Guiding the Negotiation Process

The second phase is the one in which the mediator is more actively involved in steering the negotiation process. The mediator can put on recommendations to the conflict parties, try to establish the each party's resistance point and to discover the domains where a compromise could be reached. A good mediator persuades parties to come up with proposals and counter-proposals and, when a feasible solution, begins to insist on or even put pressure on the participants to accept a settlement.

Phase 3: Movement to a Final Agreement

A good and experienced mediator knows when it is time to use diplomacy and when to put pressure to obtain the final agreement of the conflict situation. In order to obtain and maintain trust and credibility from the involved parties, it is important to be aware at the timing and sensitivity of personalities and strategic positions. The mediator might use direct discussions with every group or individual involved and in the last phase he may outline a suggestion for consideration. If it is reached a final settlement, the mediator's role is to assist the parties in the outlining their agreement, ensuring that both parties are pleased with the terms, phrasing and conditions of the document.

The mediation process is very dynamic, but delicately tuned. An experienced and good mediator is forced to be inventive, but flexible, not to impose anything to the parties

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in conflict. At last, a mediator can give some advise and can persuade parties to reach an agreement.

6. Conclusion

Because of the differences between people it is not so rare that in an organization should occur various stages of conflict, but it is the manager who must have the ability to identify the conflict from the first stages and to apply methods of resolving the situation, not to degenerate into a real conflict. Applying the methods of managing and resolving the conflict situation, every manager can keep the organization stable and able to achieve their objectives.

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