focusu

ALL ABOUT YOU!

Conflict
Management

hello@focusu.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1:
Understanding Conflict

A conflict is a struggle or sharp disagreement between people who have different/opposing ideas and interests in a subject. Conflicts can arise within one person, between two people, or even among groups. It is a natural part of life and can either give rise to positive outcomes or incredibly destructive ones – depending on how it is resolved.

Conflicts arise from changes in relationships, life changes, power struggles, and poor communication. We see it everywhere around us – in our personal lives, in our relationships, and even between countries. The workplace has not escaped its clutches, and conflict is common in organizations.

If left unresolved, conflict within a company can impact leader-employee relationships. It can take a significant toll on trust, lower morale, increase stress and health risks, increase absenteeism, decrease motivation, performance, and productivity, and even lead to high employee turnover.

There is a high chance of conflict arising wherever people work together, presenting a massive challenge to which management must respond constructively.

Conflict management is the process of limiting the negative aspects of conflict while increasing its positive effects. It aims to teach groups conflict resolution skills that will help them effectively communicate when in conflict with a team member.

Image Credits: Pixabay

Chapter 2:
The Big Why: Reasons for Workplace Conflict

Different beliefs, perceptions, and values affect the way each of us approaches work and problem-solving. When employees find it hard to accept others' methods, clashes arise. Here are some of the most common reasons for workplace conflict

1. Competition for scarce resources

Anything of value (information, budgets, space, office services, and personnel) within an organization can be sought after by several employees. A scarcity of these valuable resources can lead to conflicts between employees.

When resources are limited in an organization, every department head will try to obtain the maximum they can of those resources for their respective departments. That can give rise to conflicts between departments.

Unequal distribution of resources between employees or departments also gives rise to conflicts.

2. Time pressure

Some employees can perform better when they have to meet tight deadlines, but some employees have destructive emotional reactions that are triggered by stress.

When employees cannot meet deadlines, they might try to shift their responsibilities to another employee. That could give rise to conflicts among employees and even between departments.

3. Unreasonable policies, rules, standards, and procedures/ambiguous goals and objectives

When employees cannot attain policies, regulations, standards, and procedures, it leads to dysfunctional conflicts with their managers.

On the other hand, if an organization's goals and values are not clearly defined and easy to understand, it could obstruct the flow of work.

4. Communication breakdowns

Barriers to communication are a significant cause of conflict within an organization and give rise to misunderstandings. When employees don't have the freedom to communicate their problems with their higherups, it provokes

conflict. Inadequate communication, misinterpretations or selective interpretation, and language difficulties cause disputes between employees.

5. Personality clashes

The most common reason for workplace conflict is a clash of personalities. People have different values and perceptions, and when these do not match with their peers, it leads to severe disagreements between employees, between management and employees, or between a manager and an employee.

Two employees or managers who are both dogmatic and autocratic, are bound to have clashes in their viewpoint.

When employees have different attitudes in the workplace and conduct themselves differently, organizational conflicts arise.

6. Overlapping or ambiguous jurisdictions

Unclear job boundaries such as the range of powers and duties can create competition between managers. Conflicts can also occur between departments for control and resources.

7. Unrealized expectations

When an organization fails to meet its employees' expectations, employees are left feeling dissatisfied. On the other hand, unrealistic expectations result in destructive conflict.

8. Task interdependence

Two departments that are interdependent for directions, supplies, or even information must coordinate their activities. When the departments cannot find a way to coordinate their actions, it could lead to conflicts between them.

9. Status issues

When employees disagree with the organization's status hierarchy, they become resentful and frustrated. Employees try their best to improve their position or protect their current situation, and conflicts can arise from status discrepancies.

Status conflicts also arise from differences in job assignments, status symbols, working conditions, and inequitable rewards.

Chapter 3:
Of Tasks, Relationships & Values

Workplace conflict is categorized into three types – tasks, relationships, and values. All three categories are commonly seen in the workplace. The first step to effective conflict management is to understand these types of conflicts and the consequences of leaving them unaddressed.

Task conflict

Task conflict includes disputes involving issues related to an employee's work assignments, distribution of resources, a difference of opinion on policies and procedures, and managing expectations of work.

Relationship conflict

Relationship conflicts arise from differences in personalities, styles, attitudes to work, tastes, and even differences in conflict styles. People who have nothing in common are often thrown together to work in an organization. So, it's not surprising that relationship conflicts are frequent in organizations.

Value conflict

A difference in values and identities – including differences in ethics, politics, religion, and norms lead to simmering, unvoiced conflicts. While most organizations do not encourage political and religious discussions in the workplace, values and identities play an essential role in the context of policies and work decisions.

Workplace conflicts – whether they are task-based, relationship-based, or value-based lead to conflicts within oneself, between individuals, or between groups.

1. Conflict within oneself

Value conflicts - Conflict within oneself usually arises when there is an internal conflict between one's values and what one is expected to do. *For example, an employee might be asked to lie about his boss being out of town, although it is against his principles to lie.*

Role conflicts – when an employee is following a set of orders that contradict the second set of rules, it leaves the employee confused. *For example, if a customer care executive is ordered to be very helpful to customers, but is then reprimanded for spending too much time on each customer, this would cause conflict in the executive's mind.*

Choice conflicts – having to choose between roles. *For example, a police officer attending a best friend's party where drugs are used must decide whether he wants to do his duty as a police officer or as a friend.*

2. Interpersonal conflict

It is the most widely recognized type of workplace conflict. It could be a conflict between two employees or two managers who are competing for the same job, position, resources, or power. Interpersonal conflicts can also occur from disagreements over the organization's goals and objectives, and policies. Interpersonal conflicts arise from personality clashes.

3. Conflicts between an individual and the group.

All members of a group must adhere to specific norms of behavior to achieve specific goals. A person might want to remain in a group but may disagree with the group's rules and practices used to achieve these goals.

For example, if tips are shared equally among waiters, there might be a waiter in the group who believes that he deserves to keep his tips to himself, which causes conflict between him and the other members of the group.

4. Intergroup conflict

Organizations are made up of a network of several departments, teams, groups, and sections. Conflicts between these are very common. A relatable intergroup conflict is one between the union and the management of an organization. Another example is the conflict between line and staff members where both groups are interdependent but cannot find a way to work together.

5. inter-organization conflicts

Organizations that depend on each other for the procurement of raw materials or goods can end up disagreeing with each other with regards to policy issues, delivery times, quality, quantity, etc. Inter-organization conflict can also arise between:

- Unions and organizations that employ their members.
- Government agencies that regulate organizations and the organizations themselves.

Chapter 4:
Keys to A Conflict-Free Workplace

It's critical to accept that workplace conflict is inevitable. The good news is that within every conflict lies an opportunity for learning. Embrace conflict and look at it is a way to stimulate change and innovation.

Conflicts can be resolved by managers, opposing teams, or individuals.

Conflict management for managers

As a mediator, you must keep the following points in mind.

- Ensure open communication – the key to conflict management.
- Set rules, define acceptable behavior, and establish meeting guidelines. *For example, both parties must agree to express their view calmly and avoid interruptions.*
- Be empathetic to both conflicting parties.
- Choose a neutral location for your meeting with them. A cafeteria or a walk outside are excellent ideas.

- Approach the conversation strategically. Keep in mind the interests of both sides and understand both sides.

- As a mediator, you must have excellent listening skills.

- Avoid coercion or intimidation – these do not solve the problem on a long-term basis.

- Acknowledge that resolving conflict will take time and requires patience.

- Focus on the issue and not on the conflicting individuals.

- Seek outside help when necessary.

There are five steps that managers must follow to ensure successful conflict management and resolution between individuals or groups.

Step 1. Find the source of the conflict.

Accept the fact there is a conflict, find out its source and gather as much information about it as you can before you address it. The more information you have, the easier it is to resolve the conflict. You can ask a series of questions to identify its source.

Give both conflicting parties a chance to voice their side of the story. As well as giving you a better idea of the situation, this will also show that you are impartial to both parties.

Step 2. Look beyond the conflicting incident

Often, a particular event (even a minor one) triggers conflict that festers over time. Ultimately, one side breaks, resulting in visible and disruptive behavior. The source of the dispute (the trigger incident) is forgotten, and only the present behavior is addressed. However, you must get to the source of the conflict and discuss it.

Step 3. Request solutions

Once you have got both party's viewpoints, the next step is to find ways to resolve the conflict. Most often, the best solutions are provided by the party's themselves. As a mediator, get solutions from both sides. You must be an active listener as well as a good reader of verbal nuances and body language.

At this stage, both the disputing parties could resolve in finger-pointing and blame games – both of which must be discouraged.

Step 4. Identify solutions that both the disputing parties are ready to support

Now that you have all the viable solutions, point out the merits of each of the solutions from the perspective of the disputing parties and organization.

Step 5: Agree on a solution

The final step is to choose the best solution – one that works for both parties and the organization, and get both parties to accept it as the future course of action. Act decisively. Do not leave any part of the conflict in limbo.

It is critical at this point to also talk about how to avoid conflicts and how future conflicts will be addressed.

Strategies to manage and prevent workplace conflict – for managers, teams, and individuals

Only managers don't need to resolve conflicts. Teams and individuals can do their part to prevent and manage workplace conflict.

Image Credits: Pixabay

Chapter 5:
Referee Your Organization

Senior management plays an integral part in company-wide conflict management. Leaders who ignore conflicts or allow conflict to fester will find that over time theirs is a toxic workplace environment. The best solution to avoid that kind of situation is to confront conflict head-on. Conflicts give you a chance to build trust and relationships with your employees.

Managing conflict in a company-wide ecosystem can be tricky because you might not be familiar with the broader ecosystem or the environment, the conflicting individuals, teams, or departments operate. However, it must be done. Here are some tips that will help.

1. Don't prevent or avoid conflict

Preventing conflict will only lead to the festering of dissatisfaction, enmity, and decreased production – all of which are bad for the organization.

2. Time conflict management wisely

The best time for action is when you have enough proof that there is indeed a conflict that must be addressed. Act immediately if everyone is aware of the problem. You lose respect as a leader if everyone sees the problem but you refuse to address it.

3. Decide on a course of action

How you deal with adversity is as vital as acknowledging it and taking action. The way you approach the problem and solve it will reveal the kind of leader you are.

4. Know your boundaries

While you must manage conflicts within the organization, you must know that there are limitations and boundaries of the conflicting parties that you cannot cross. Understand the rewards and the risks of conflict management within the limits of the conflicting employees. Also, help others recognize their boundaries and let them know when they cross the line – all this is done through careful observation.

5. Respect differences

As a leader, you might be tempted to impose your authority over your employees. It is essential to respect their differences and learn to see things from their points of view. That will also help you better understand how conflicts can be avoided in the future.

6. Confront the tension

As a leader, one of your skills must be to perceive tensions that are not obvious to others. When you sense tensions arising from conflicts, use your leadership to actively address the conflicts before they get out of hand and before circumstances force you to take action.

Chapter 6:
Detoxing Your Company of Conflict

While its impossible to permanently avoid conflict in the workplace, it is possible to develop a positive workplace environment after a conflict has been resolved. Here are three tips to follow at an organizational level, individual level, and at a team level.

1. Take immediate and practical affirmative steps.

While the conflict has been resolved, steps must be taken to ensure similar situations are avoided. These steps include:

- Working with attorneys to come up with necessary documentations.

- Coming up with a plan of action regarding situations you have been avoiding.

- Managing internal repercussions in the organization.

- Reorganizing your schedule to meet responsibilities assigned to you.

2. Exorcise the conflict from your body so it does not stick with you and slow you down.

- Exercise can help relieve the stress that has been accumulating in your body.
- Consider yoga, taiji, and meditation that are all known to relieve the body of stress.
- Get a massage, have a drink or watch a movie – whatever works for you.

3. Concentrate on the future and not on the past.

Avoid ruminating on the past. Managers in conflict should seek new opportunities and responsibilities. Employees must wrap up their existing projects and move on to the next project. Seek out personal interactions with people who do not concentrate on

Image Credits: Pixabay

focus›u

ALL ABOUT YOU!

A few books that we recommend: