Chapter 3
Organisational Conflict and Its Management

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ABSTRACT

This chapter concerns itself with defining conflict and discusses the value it provides to organizations engaging in conflicts. The chapter is structured so that first we will provide a brief on the need to study conflict and negotiations in organizations. Then the discussion will move to the different drivers of organizational conflicts and will conclude with a typology of the different conflicts that exist within organizations. The third section will focus on the models (life-cycles) of conflicts that are available in conflict literature. The final section will focus on the different conflict handling techniques that are available. This section will include a discussion on the different conflict handling styles and negotiation tactics, and a brief on the process of alternate dispute resolution in conflict management.

INTRODUCTION

Conflict and negotiation pervade all sorts of organizations. It is therefore important to understand the nature and types of conflicts so that they may be adequately resolved using appropriate negotiation strategies. To achieve this goal, this chapter first engages with the concepts of conflict and negotiations at a theoretical level and then empirically. The chapter is structured so that first we develop a case for the study of organizational conflicts and negotiations. We first provide a discussion on the different triggers of conflict. This setup's the ground for a discussion on the value of conflict; here we discuss both the positives and negatives of conflicts. We then position our discussion towards the resolution of conflicts. Then the discussion turns to the different ways of measuring conflict and the conflict management styles. Then, we provide a discussion based on empirical evidence pertaining to the causes of organizational conflicts and strategies of conflict prevention and handling. Finally, the last section concludes the chapter.

BACKGROUND

Conflicts are common to all types of organizations because we perceive or value things differently. The concept of a conflict denotes some type of disagreement, incompatibility or opposition among groups (Perrow, 1986). Conflicts may arise from disagreements and oppositions in cognitions, emotions, behaviors, and goals and the means to achieve them (Klausner & Groves, 1994). A collection of key definitions of conflict and their underlying theme is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Conflict definitions

Definition	Source	Underlying Theme	Perceives Conflict
An antagonistic struggle	(Coser, 1956)	Hostility	Negatively
A breakdown in standard mechanisms of decision-making	(March & Simon, 1958)	Lack of consensus	Negatively
A struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power, and resources	(Boulding, 1962)	Scarcity	Negatively
A struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate the rivals	(Coser, 1967)	Scarcity/hostility	Negatively
A breach in normally expected behavior	(Beals & Siegel, 1966)	Poor Behavior	Negatively
A threat to cooperation	(Marek, 1966)	Lack of cooperation	Negatively
Opposing processes in any of several forms – competition, status, rivalry, bargaining, sabotage, verbal abuse, etc.	(Walton, 1966)	Opposition (may not be hostile)	Negatively
Any social situation or process in which two or more social entities are linked by at least one form of antagonistic interaction	(Fink, 1968)	Hostility	Negatively
As existing whenever incompatible activities occur in an action which prevents, obstructs, interferes with, injures, or in some way makes it less likely or less effective	(Deutsch, 1973)	Interference	Negatively
Arising when a difference between two (or more) people necessitates change in at least one person in order for their engagement to continue and develop – the differences cannot coexist without some adjustment	(Jordan, 1990)	Difference	Negatively
A situation in which interdependent people express (manifest or latent) differences in satisfying their individual needs and interests, and they experience interference from each other in accomplishing these goals	(Donohue & Colt, 1992)	Interference	Negatively
As a process that begins when one party or individual perceives that one or more others have frustrated or are about to frustrate a major concern of theirs	(Thomas, 1992)	Hindrance	Negatively
An expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals	(Hocker & Wilmot, 1995)	Struggle	Negatively
A way of confronting reality and creating new solutions	(Socklingam & Doswell, 1999)	Solution	Positively
The perceived incompatibility between values/goals	(Deutsch & Coleman, 2000; Reichers, 1986)	Clash	Negatively

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