

Managing Workplace Conflicts Through Self-Mediation



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INTRODUCTION

Workplace conflicts have become a major threat to the achievement of the corporate objectives of organizations (Robyn, 2016). It engenders bitterness, withdrawal, despondency, sabotage and in some extreme cases, suicide and death with grave implications on the overall performance of organizations. In spite of the evidence that there is a deluge of literature on how to manage workplace conflict, managing organizational conflict from the perspective of self-mediation has received little attention. While existing literature (Brokenburr & O'Donnell, 2016; Robyn, 2016; Deepak & Max, 2008; Hayes, 2008; Shay & Margaret, 2008; Marick & Robert, 2002; and Lebedun, 1998) mainly focuses on managing processes, inter-personal and inter-group conflicts within an organization, this study makes a case for mediating the interaction of negative energies within an individual before engaging other actors and issues in the organization.

The importance of this study revolves around the need to contribute to the development of a more robust framework for managing workplace conflict. The thesis propagated by this study centers around the assumption that purging oneself of combustible negative energies is the critical first step in effective management of workplace conflicts. This is so because, although conflict may be externally generated or triggered, its tendency to escalate or deescalate is primarily dependent on the actors' management of their internal negative impulses. The impulse that predisposes an actor to shout, ignore, slap, fight, cry, refuse to attend or contribute at meetings or generally, undermine the corporate objectives of the organization are all internal to the actor. Therefore, if actors are able to mediate these negative impulses, workplace conflicts would be significantly reduced and achievement of the corporate objectives of the organization enhanced.

The study employs the documentary method of data collection, which entails the use of materials from secondary sources. Analyses of issues are based on an objective assessment of relevant literature from where study gaps are identified and issues placed in perspective. Delivery is done with some hypothetical case studies/analysis to offer some practical insights on how to self-mediate within specific contexts. The general objective of the study is to examine how workplace conflicts can be managed to enhance organizational effectiveness, efficiency, growth and stability. The specific objective is to examine how workplace conflicts can be managed through self-mediation. The study attempts to answer the question: How can workplace conflicts be managed through self-mediation? It is hoped that the study would lay a foundation for a new research endeavor and also hopefully provide a background for a much broader future exploration of how workplace conflicts can be managed through self-mediation. The study thus, comprises thirteen sub-topics; an introduction is followed by a background to the study. Other sub-topics focuses respectively on understanding workplace conflict, some myths about conflict, self-mediation, emotions in self-mediation, four types of conflict in the workplace, managing conflicts in the workplace

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through self-mediation 3Rs, cost of conflict, further research directions, conclusion and recommended actions, references and additional readings.

BACKGROUND

Organizations exist essentially to provide goods and services to the public. In achieving this noble objective, human and material resources are often deployed through a complex web of processes which may include; concept design and setting, content and site development, recruitment and staffing, departmentalization and activation. This applies mostly to new business formations, but for existing organizations, processes may include; review of extant policies concerning personnel and human resources as well as general restructuring and rebranding. These processes, whether in emerging or existing organizations are burdened with conflict inducing elements. A piece of land or office space that is bought or acquired for the establishment of a new enterprise, recruitment, staffing, departmentalization and activation are obviously products of negotiation and therefore, assumed to be results of rational thinking and choices. Review of organizational policies and restructuring suggest that some processes and people would be affected. An immediate take away from this scenario is the likelihood, that if these processes are not sensitively managed, they may impact the capacity of the organization to optimally meet its objective.

There is however, a growing consensus that workplace conflict is so pervasive that it can hardly go unnoticed as it has a tendency of negatively impacting the fortune of the organization. Robyn (2016) quoting Hayes (2008) aptly made the point where the following statistics were offered to demonstrate the ubiquity of conflict in the workplace:

- 85 percent of employees deal with conflict on some level
- 29 percent of employees deal with it almost constantly
- 34 percent of conflict occurs among front-line employees
- 12 percent of employees say they frequently witness conflict among the senior team
- 49 percent of conflict is a result of personality clashes and “warring egos”
- 34 percent of conflict is caused by stress in the workplace
- 33 percent of conflict is caused by heavy workloads
- 27 percent of employees have witnessed conflicts lead to personal attacks
- 25 percent of employees have seen conflict result in sickness or absence
- 9 percent have seen workplace conflict cause a project to fail

The ubiquity of workplace conflict as indicated above highlight the need for an appropriate and effective conflict management solution yet, organizations globally, are inanimate contraptions, without life and form and in their inanimate form, can achieve little without the human agency. The human agency therefore, animate organizations giving them life, form and identity. In the course of giving organizations the attributes of ‘living organisms’, the human factor, is often challenged by the interactions of internal negative combustible energies, first within the ‘self’ then, between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ and also between the ‘self’, ‘others’ and the organization and its processes. Within this context, this study therefore, examines the management of workplace conflicts through self-mediation - a process of purging oneself of combustible negative energies with the intent of setting the right foundation in dealing with others and organizational processes.

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