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INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT (TO MANAGE OR NOT TO MANAGE)

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Abstract

The shift in global power has led not only to a diffusion of power, but also to a diffusion of ideas, concepts, principles, value and preferences in the last decades. A comprehensive approach called “security governance” has been introduced in order to cope with the problems caused by this conceptual change. Security governance, which presents an understanding of the concept of security beyond the issue of defense and encompasses the ‘more diverse, less visible and less predictable’, has become one of the most controversial issues both for academicians and defense experts. In this study, we aim to discuss the present condition of security governance both in Turkey and in the world in a comparative manner.

Keywords: interpersonal, conflict, management, consequences

1. Introduction

Conflict is natural in all workplaces and circumstances. It happens usually in everyday situations and can differ in level and intensity. When people work together, there are inevitably divergences. Some of these divergences are minor, but some can convert into major conflict. If conflicts are not resolved, they can conduct to long-term pressure and discontent amongst employees.

On the other hand conflicts may have a negative impact on organizations and people, including productivity, cooperation, communication and the quality of life at work and home.

Human interaction is at the center of our existence; we are all interconnected. Since conflict - differing opinions, goals, needs, desires or perceptions of entitlement - is a fact of life, the mode in which we manage conflict affects the quality of our interactions, our lives, and our organizations.

My paper goal is to determine how to reduce the negative consequences of workplace conflicts and how to strengthen interpersonal relationships by learning to manage interpersonal conflict situations and the responses to them.

In the first part of this paper I explain some general aspects regarding interpersonal conflicts in organizations, such as what are interpersonal conflicts, different approaches about conflicts, causes and factors of the conflicts.

In the second part I illustrate some techniques, strategies and practical skills for conflict resolution that can be readily applied within a variety of contexts to reduce the conflict impact on you at the work place.

At the same time, I hope that knowledge of these techniques can help avoid the negative effects the managers can assume to consolidate a positive climate within the organization, based on mutual trust and motivation.

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2. General aspects regarding interpersonal conflicts in organizations

2.1. What is interpersonal conflict?

Interpersonal conflict is a process that happens when one person, group, or organizational department prevents another from the achievement of the proposed goal. In its classic form, conflict involves antagonistic attitudes and behaviours such as name calling, sabotage, or even physical aggression.

or

It is a process that begins when one party perceives that another party has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect, something that the first party cares about.

2.2. When may conflict happen?

According to Roloff (1987), conflict may **happen** when:

- a party is required to engage in an activity which is incongruent with his or her needs or interests.
- a party holds behavioral preferences, the satisfaction of which is incompatible with another person's accomplishment of his or her preferences.
- a party wants some reciprocally attractive resources that is in small supply, such that the needs of everyone may not be fulfilled entirely.
- a party possesses goals, values, attitudes, and skills that are significant in directing his or her behavior but are perceived to be exclusive of the goals, values, attitudes, and skills held by the other(s).
- two parties have partially exclusive behavioral preferences regarding their mutual actions.

2.3. Positive and negative consequences of conflict in organizations

Traditional view of conflict

This view underlines the idea that all conflicts are dangerous and must be avoided. The traditional view focuses on attitudes and group behavior. It was advanced in the 1930s and 1940s when conflict was seen as a dysfunctional result.

Human Relations view of conflict

The human relations position is that conflict is a normal result in all groups and organizations. Because conflict was inevitable, the Human Relations school supported acceptance of conflict. This means that it cannot be eliminated and there are even times when conflict may benefit a group's performance. The human relations view dominated conflict theory from the late 1940s through the mid 1970s.

Interactionist view of conflict

Whereas the human relations approach accepted conflict, the inter-actionist approach encourages conflict on the justification that a peaceful, harmonious, supportive and cooperative group is exposed to becoming static and nonresponsive to requirements for change and innovation. This gives confidence to group leaders to maintain a constant minimum level of conflict.

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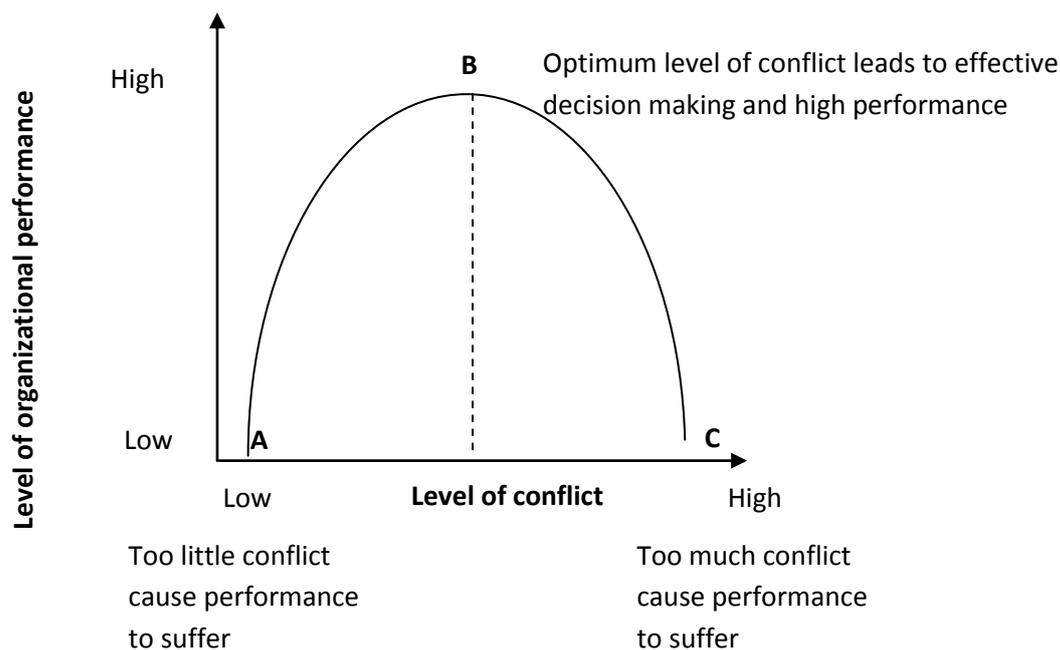


Fig. 1 The effect of conflict on organizational performance[1]

The employees' efficiency is optimal at a moderate level of conflict and the absence of conflict expresses a certain ceiling of their performance. On the other hand when conflict is high, failures that occur can even threaten the existence of that organization.

2.4. Causes of conflict in organizations

When people work together, conflict becomes a part of doing business - it's a normal event in any workplace. Interpersonal conflict can happen from various causes for instance personal differences, lack of information, environmental stress and role incompatibility. Some examples are listed and explained below.

- A. Lack of information:** Conflict may occur when information is not received, or information is not understood as anticipated. To facilitate avoidance of this type of conflict it is good to be as clear and careful in communications as possible.
- B. Confidence problems:** Confidence is the base of a good relationship and disputes may begin when one partner in a relationship does not trust the other with telling the truth.
- C. Communication:** Poor communication conducts to misunderstanding and dissension among employees. For instance, misunderstandings can occur if the manager asks one employee to transmit important instructions to the other

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employees, but the employee fails to do so correctly. Transmission wrong information can conduct to projects being improperly done and to employees blaming each other for the end result. The possibility of a conflict increases when too little or too much communication is.

D. Group identification and intergroup partiality

This is the predisposition of persons to develop a more positive view of their own "in-group" and a less positive view of "out-groups" of which they are not a member.

This predisposition is expected to grow when group membership is fundamentally random. The best prediction is that people who identify with some groups are inclined to be doubtful of out-group members.

E. Interdependence

The potential for conflict subsists when persons or subunits are reciprocally dependent on each other to achieve their own objectives. The potential for the power abuse in such relationships and the constant call for for coordination are both potential problem areas.

F. Differences in status, power and culture

Conflicts may explode when parties are different in status, power or culture.

Status. Status differences contain the maximum potential for conflict when an inversion of anticipated roles happens; for example, when a high status person, like a manager, finds themselves being learned on computer practice by their administrative subordinate. Some managers are suspicious regarding this inversion of roles.

Power. If confidence is not reciprocal, but in one direction an inequity in power can happen and the potential for conflict increases.

Culture. When two or more different cultures appear in an organization, the disagree in beliefs and values may outcome in explicit conflict.

G. Ambiguity

Ambiguous purposes, rules, or performance criteria are conflict sources. Ambiguous performance criteria are a regular cause of conflict between managers and employees. In ambiguity the formal and informal roles that rule interaction fail and it is difficult to establish responsibility.

H. Insufficient resources

Differences in power are increased when resources are in small quantity. Resources insufficiency has the ability to transform conflicts masked or latent into clear and acute conflicts. For instance two colleagues who do not get along too well stand an armistice until a reduction in the office space that causes everyone to defend own domain.

2.5. Behavioral, Cognitive, and Affective Aspects

The *behavioral aspect* refers to someone who, due to the conflict, interferes with the goals of another through their behavior. An illustration of this is somebody who may try to obstruct a project you are working on at the office to stop you from being promoted.

The *cognitive aspect* of difference among people consists of a disagree between the two sides that illustrates their different visions, goals and interests. For example when the manager responsible of fabrication disagrees with the product development manager concerning how resources must be allocated due to having different goals for his department.

The *affective aspect* addresses the negative emotional contact on the incompatible persons such as irritation, stress, and frustration.

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3. Techniques for managing interpersonal conflicts

3.1. What is Conflict Management

Conflict management is the practice of being able to identify and handle conflicts prudently, efficiently, and fairly.

3.2 Styles of Managing Conflict

Conflict specialist Kenneth Thomas has developed a set of five conflict management styles that illustrate how assertive you are in trying to assure your own or your group's concerns and how cooperative you are in trying to satisfy those of the other party or group.

A. Avoiding

Avoiding is a conflict management style characterized by low assertiveness of one's own interests and low cooperation with the other party. This is the "hiding the head in the sand" response to conflict. Its efficiency is often limited. This type of conflict style does not help the other workforce members reach their goals and does not help the manager who is avoiding the issue and cannot assertively follow his or her own goals. This management style works well when the issue is unimportant or when the manager has no chance to win.

B. Accommodating

Accommodating is a conflict management style in which one party cooperates with the other party, despite the fact that not promoting one's own interests. This may be seen as a sign of weakness.

This approach is useful when the other person is experienced or has a better solution.

C. Competing

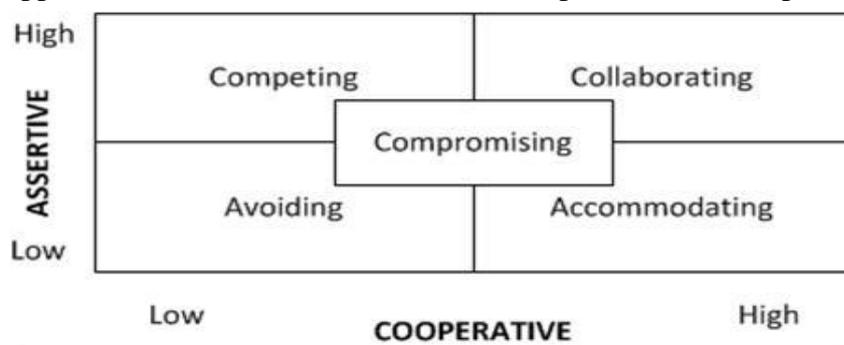
Competing is a conflict management style that maximizes assertiveness for your own position and minimizes cooperative responses. This is the win-lose scenario. A manager is performing in a very assertive mode to obtain his own goals without looking for cooperating with other employees. This approach may be suitable for urgent situations when time is essential.

D. Compromise

Compromise is a conflict management style that combines middle levels of assertiveness and cooperation. This is the lose-lose approach where neither employee nor manager really reaches what they want. Compromise does not always result in the most inspired answer to conflict. This approach may be suitable when it is needed a momentary solution or when both sides have similarly essential goals.

E. Collaborating

Collaborating is a conflict management style that maximizes both assertiveness and cooperation. It requires deep analysis of the problem, to identify key issues for stakeholders and find that beneficial alternative. Managers become associates to realize both of their goals in this style. Collaboration works as a problem-solving scenario where the purpose is to establish a win-win solution to the conflict that wholly satisfies the interests of both parties. Valuable collaboration frequently improves productivity and success. It is presumed that the solution to the conflict can leave both parties in a better situation. This approach is useful when the issue is too important for a compromise.



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Fig. 2 Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument[2]

3.3. Managing conflict through negotiation

Negotiation is a decision-making process between inter-dependent parties who do not share the same preferences. Negotiation represents conflict management, in that it is also a try to avoid conflict or to resolve existing conflict. It is a try to arrive at a reasonable exchange between the parties.

It can be distinguished between distributive and integrative negotiation tactics.

Distributive negotiation suppose a win-lose situation in which a fixed quantity of resources is divided between parties.

Integrative negotiation is a win-win situation that supposes that mutual issue solving can increase the resources to be divided between the parties.

Distributive and integrative negotiations may occur simultaneously.

A. Distributive negotiation tactics

Distributive negotiation is essentially a negotiation dedicated to a single issue. Many conflict situations fit this scenario. Let's say you find a second-hand car that you like more. The problem comes down to price. You want to buy for the lowest reasonable price while the seller wants to get the highest price reasonably. Realization a satisfactory resolution in distributive negotiation involves both parties reaching at a point in the "settlement range", an area of overlap between each party's target and their resistance point. Several techniques can influence how that point is determined.

Threats and promises. Threats consist of involving that punishment will approach if the adversary does not compromise to your position. Even if it seems threats are not an appropriate form of conflict management, they can be interpreted as a sign that warns that other side is on the point on which discussion is not willing to give. Promises are guarantees that compromise guides to potential rewards in the future.

Inflexibility versus concession. Intransigence is often met by the same and the negotiations are deadlocked. A series of small concessions early in the process is often being matched.

Persuasion. Verbal persuasion is frequent in negotiations. It is a try to modify the position of the other party in the direction of your target position.

B. Integrative negotiation tactics

The imagination required to move past "fixed-pie" bargain can be well worth the effort. For example a number of factors can help to make it happen.

Extension of the Information Exchange. Most of the information exchanged in distributive transactions attacking the other party's position and trying to convince the correctness of their positions. A free flow of information is crucial for an integrative arrangement. One suitable method is to give the first little nonessential information. Parties need to give away non-critical information early to start the ball rolling, ask lots of questions and listen to the answers. Trust must be built slowly so that "positions" give way to the communication of true interests.

Costs Reduction. Integrative solutions are particularly attractive when it can be decrease costs for all parties in a dispute.

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Resources Increase. The final resolution to "fixed-pie" negotiating is to include the parties utilize their collective power to get bigger resources which they can then divide.

Introducing Superior Goals. *Superior Goals* are attractive results that can be accomplished only by cooperation. Neither party can reach the goal on its own.

C. Third Party Involvement

Third parties may intervene between negotiating parties when an impasse is reached (management disagreements) or may be involved from the start as a normal part of the process of dealing (real estate agents).

There are 4 basic third party roles:

Mediator is a neutral third party who facilitates a negotiated solution by using reasons and persuasion, suggesting alternatives. This happens when a neutral third party assists to facilitate a negotiated agreement by helping the process of bargaining or by intervening in the content of the negotiation.

It has to mention that without the cooperation of both parties, mediation is likely to fail.

Arbitrator is a third party with the authority to dictate an agreement. The big benefit of arbitration more than mediation is that it always results in a resolution. This happens when a third party is given the authority to order the conditions of settlement of a conflict. In standard arbitration, the arbitrator can choose any result, such as dividing the difference between the two parties. Finally each party makes a final offer and the arbitrator chooses one of them.

Conciliator is a trusted third party who provides an informal communication link between the negotiator and the opponent

Consultant is an impartial third party, skilled in conflict management, who tries to make possible creative problem solving through communication and analysis.

3.4. Ways to manage interpersonal conflicts

Most conflicts happen at two levels at the same time: the content level and the relationship level. The content level is the common problem such as the dishes needing to be washed. The relationship level engages elements such as status, chain of command, and keeping reputation and respect of other people. The results of conflicts can be win-lose, lose-lose, or win-win. In the win-lose result, one party in the conflict is pleased in the short time but sooner or later the situation turn into a lose-lose for both parties. Approaches to manage or resolve conflict may contain finding ways to reduce feelings of dissatisfaction by helping people to see things from the other point of view.

Use "I" Language: When managing with disputes, avoid using terms that exaggerate such as "always", "never", "nothing" or "can't", or using negative speech. Use "I" language, even when referring to the other person's performance, and explain how you feel instead of attacking the other person. For instance, instead of saying "you just don't care", say "I feel that you don't care about this problem." Using "I" language makes it less probable that the other person will find defensive and will permit you to achieve a resolution sooner.

Use Exploring Questions: Ask questions to discover what the other person think and feel such as "What views would you like to share with me?" Encourage people to fully communicate what they think and feel. This allows you to see the entirely situation.

Stay Positive: Stay as positive as possible and look for encouraging things to say about the other person even if one or both of you is angry. For example, you may say "I respect you for bringing this problem to my attention."

3.5. Inefficient strategies for dealing with conflicts

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Passivity

It is perhaps the most common managerial attitude, believing that if we do nothing and ignore the problem, it will disappear. But not really happen like that. Ignoring the problem can only serve to increase feelings of frustration and anger of those involved.

Bureaucratic measures

In some cases managers acknowledge that there is a problem but do not take a serious measure. Instead, they write reports showing that the problem is under investigation but that there is insufficient information.

Hidden passivity

With this tactic managers aim tricking people dissatisfied while they declare that settlement procedure is open.

Discretion

Often managers believe that acting discreetly may lead to the fulfilment of a controversial decision with minimum resistance.

"Assassination" of the character A person who is dissatisfied (e.g. pretending to be treated discriminatory) is labelled as provocative trouble. Attempts are made to discredit and isolate it from other group members, hoping that the problem will be solved.

3.6. Managing interpersonal conflicts at work

How can a manager handle a conflict between employees?

It is usual to try to avoid a conflict, but a manager has to deal often with conflicts between employees. In this case you must try to do this without showing any partiality to one or the other, in the most fair way possible. Below are shown five steps that a manager has to follow in order to handle a conflict between employees.

Step 1

Speak to each employee separately. This gives you a chance to listen to each side without interruption. Also, try to determine not only the employee's accusation, but also his needs.

Step 2

Establish the basic issue in the conflict. For instance, some troubles arise when employees have different styles of working or thinking - if one employee is systematic while the other is vague. Some issues may have their basis outside the office - an employee is short with others because he has problems at home.

Step 3

Meet with both employees together to talk about the issue. In most situations, the employees have not yet spoken their true feelings to the other employee.

Step 4

Propose solutions to the problems. These solutions need both employees to make sacrifices.

Step 5

Keep close contact with the employees.

Learning conclusions:

- Analyse an existing conflict situation.
- Learn how your communication style can realize spectacular outcomes. It is not about complicated situations or difficult people.
- Learn strategies for managing conflict.
- Learn to identify and analyze conflict in the workplace – is it good? Is it bad?
- Learn and understand factors that influence our perception and reaction.

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- Understand how to improve productivity by the effective handling of conflict.
- Achieve skills to contribute to a collaborative and open work environment.
- Remember each conflict style and when to use it, as follows:

Conflict style	When you should consider using a specific conflict style effectively?
Avoidance (lose-lose situation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When an issue is not important • When the cost of confrontation outweighs benefits • To let people cool down and regain perspective
Accommodation (lose-win situation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When you realize you are wrong • When issues are more important to others than to yourself and to satisfy others and maintain cooperation • To build up social “credits” for future issues • When the long-term cost of winning isn’t worth the short-term gain • To let others learn from their own mistakes
Competition (win-lose situation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When there is not enough time for collaboration • Where unpopular actions need implementing (in cost cutting, enforcing unpopular rules, discipline). • When the issues is not important enough to discuss at length • When you are convinced that your position is correct and necessary • To protect yourself against people who take advantage of noncompetitive behavior.
Compromise (partial lose-lose situation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the issues are moderately important but not enough for a impasse • When opponents are strongly committed to mutually exclusive goals • To achieve quick, temporary solutions • As a backup when collaboration doesn’t work
Collaboration (win-win situation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the issue is too important for a compromise • When a long term relationship between you and the other person is important • To merge insight with someone who has a different perspective on the problem • To develop a relationship by showing commitment and concern for both parties • To come up with creative and unique solution to the problem

Table 1

4. Conclusion

The employees’ attitude towards work is a complex factor. On one hand, it is influenced both by the organizational climate and the organizational culture and, on the other hand, by the style of management.

Interpersonal conflicts within organization can interfere with business operations and can have a negative impact on the relationships, so it is important to learn to recognize and deal with this type of conflict to minimize its negative effects. Acknowledging that a

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difficult situation exists is the first step to handle a conflict. Also, when the conflict becomes too serious, it can be a good idea to get a mediator involved to have another point of view and to help resolve the dispute.

As it can see from this paper, an important component of management skills is the ability to manage interpersonal conflicts. Management skills are critical but nevertheless difficult to gain and improve. Even the best and most experienced manager can often find themselves tested in difficult situations. That means acquiring the management skills required to help him avoid crisis situations before they ever occur.

In conclusion conflicts are inevitable, but what matters is how a manager deals with those conflicts before they become destructive. Consequently, a manager has to develop the ability not to take sides but to mediate impartiality.

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