

Review Assessment of Concept Conflict Views, Causes and Management of Conflict

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Abstract

One of the most important issues regarding conflict is that it is inevitable in everyday life. Conflict refers to a situation in which persons or group disagree over means or ends and try to establish their views in preference to others. On the other hand, states that conflict is perceived or experienced incompatible differences within the individual or between two or more individuals which may lead to some or other form of opposition. Conflict cannot be regarded as a sign of incompetence; it is a legitimate aspect of human behavior. It is not only avoidable but also serves a useful function for stimulating creative solution to problems. Conflict can have a positive or negative outcome, depending on how it is managed. For principals to be effective in a situation he/she needs to learn how to create positive conflict and how to manage negative conflict. The finding in this investigation revealed that performance evaluation system and the reward attached to it was found to be the top major causes of conflict between teachers and principals. In addition, communication problems, bad working conditions, lack of participative decision-making, lack of commitment and lack of collaborative problem solving were among the major causes of conflict.

Keywords: Concept, Conflict, Effects of Conflicts, Management, Nature, Types of Conflict

DOI: 10.7176/PPAR/13-6-01

Publication date:September 30th 2023

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Education is a universal practice in which societies are engaged at all stages of development. One of the ultimate aims of education is to strengthen the individuals and the society's problem solving capacity and ability; that is, people can solve different problems using education. Education lies at the heart of social and economic development. It has the power to reduce poverty, improve health, and promote democracy. In order to gain these benefits from education the role of educational managers' function is highly significant in managing conflict generating practices in education (schools) (Steyn et al, 2003)

In addition to this, conflict is assumed to be a natural part of modern organization. The reason behind this is that because it involves problem solving and decision-making and is at times credited with positive effects up on the organization. Accordingly, conflict will persist where irreconcilable differences exist. Disputes or services disagreement can develop on both personal and organizational levels (Erasmus& Swart, 2000).

According to Toby (1999) there is specific reason why functional conflict occurs and these needs not necessarily be seen as bad or destructive. Conflict can be significant as well as beneficial. It is beneficial when it indicates that a problem exists and so acts as a warning sign of potential problems. The four aspects that characterize conflict may be beneficial or functional. These are (Erasmus et al, 2000): Conflict is a general phenomenon of human existence, that is, to be human is to experience conflicts, conflict embraces a wide spectrum of social relationship, conflict occurs because of incompatible interests between people, groups and organizations, and there are diverse opinions, attitudes, out looks and motives with in any organizations.

In addition, conflict is widespread in human societies. It is universal in human affairs. Conflict occurs: among social institution among organization, with in organizations, among the members of an organization, and within the personality of each individual. So, the presence of conflict is an everyday reality for all managers (Ayalew, 2000). Conflict has the potential for either a great deal of destruction or much creativity and positive social change or influence. Therefore, it is essential to understand the basic processes of conflict so that we can work to maximize productive outcomes and minimize destructive ones.

In support of this idea, Ayalew (2000) states that conflict is universal in human affairs and are not usually bad for an organization or for an individual. Because it has several advantages such as, it initiates a search for ways to eliminate or resolve conflict, leading to innovation and changes, to make change more acceptable and desirable, and it has strategic implications for bosses and their subordinates. Furthermore, several authors state that there are several sources of conflicts in different situations and occasions.

These includes scarce resources, jurisdictional ambiguities, personality clashes, power and status differences, communication breakdowns, role conflict and ambiguity, decision making process, leadership style

of the managers, conflict management strategies and skills of principals, (Organ&Bateman, 1991, Ayalew, 2000).

2. The Concept of Conflict

Scholars, educators, and philosophers are at odds with one another over the definition, concept/nature, views, causes and management of conflict. In the vast body of scientific literature, there is no consensus on specific definition of conflict. There is general concurrence, however, that two things are essential to any conflict. These are divergent or apparently divergent views and incompatibility of those views (Ownes, 1998).

Conflict refers to a situation in which persons or group disagree over means or ends and try to establish their views in preference to others (Ayalew, 2000). Kroon (1991), on the other hand, states that conflict is perceived or experienced incompatible differences within the individual or between two or more individuals which may lead to some or other form of opposition. Furthermore, a conflict may be defined as the pursuit by two different persons of goals that are incompatible so that gains by one person must inevitably come about at the expense of the other (Rashid, 1983). Similarly, Stoner (1998) views conflict as a disagreement about the allocation of scarce resources or clashes regarding goals, values, and so on, can occur on the interpersonal or organization level.

According to Hellriegel and Slocum (1996), conflict is opposition arising from disagreement about goals, thoughts or emotions within or among individuals, team, department or organization. Ayalew (2000), defines conflict as a breakdown in the standard mechanism of decision making so that an individual or a group experiences difficulty in selecting an alternative, whilst Slabbert (1987) describes conflict as a dynamic process of interaction between two or more people or groups competing for rare resource, whose conflict objectives or needs have irreconcilable standards. Conflict is universal in human affairs and it is natural. Conflict, to differing degrees, occurs daily in every one's life. Conflict is not necessary good or bad or conflict is not always bad for an organization or for an individual. It's the way that it is handled that makes the outcome positive or negative. If handled effectively it can create a good learning experience. If not handled properly and efficiently, conflict can lead to physical and emotional violence (Ayalew, 2000 & Jones, 1994). Difference is an inevitable part of any organization, including schools. Principals, management teams and educator may bear variance when the actions of one person are interfering with or obstructing their work. That means, conflict in school takes different forms, for example teachers seem reluctant to obey the principals, they do not seem to follow rules or accept extra work, they do not easily get along with their principals. Principals too adopt an authoritative approach; they pressurize teachers for an interrupted working of the school activities.

It, therefore, becomes common that conflict between teachers and school principal occur frequently at any time in the school (Plunkett & Attner, 1997). Conflict in organizations is now seen as inevitable, endemic and often legitimate. This is because the individuals and groups within the human social system are interdependent and constantly engaged in the dynamic processes of defining and redefining the nature and extent of their interdependence. Important to the dynamic of this social process is the fact that the environment in which it occurs is, itself constantly changing (Ownes 1998).

In organization, when people work cooperatively and harmoniously with collaborative effort, it is true that for conflict to occur. Thus, conflict is present in all human experience; it is becoming an important aspect of organization behavior in education. That is why management scholars are interested in studying organizational conflicts in recent times (Rahim, 1986). In the past time, the existence of conflict is viewed as evidence of breakdown in the organizations, failure on the part of management to plan adequately and /or to exercise sufficient control. In human relations, view, conflict is seen in an especially negative light as evidence of failure to develop appropriate norms in the group (Ownes, 1998). Ayalew (2000) indicated that the human relation movement implied that conflict is inherently undesirable and should be replaced by harmony, cooperation and stability. Furthermore, for many people, the word conflict has a negative connotation such as war, destruction, aggression, Violence, competition and a malfunctioning of the organization or the individual. For other, the word has a positive connotation, such as excitement, intrigue, adventure and challenge.

Other people respond to conflict with mixed feelings, this is probably the most realistic and useful point of view of conflict for a manager (Ayalew, 2000). Generally, conflict occurs at two levels within organization; interpersonal and inter-group. It can also occur within person and between person and social units. The literature tries to confine itself to conflict in organizational life (organization conflicts). These are intra-organizational conflicts and mostly involve interpersonal and inter-group conflicts (Ownes, 1998). So, there are different level of conflict occurs in organization because of different reasons.

2.1. The Traditional View of Conflict

The traditional view is the early approach to conflict and assumed that conflict was bad, harmful and must be avoided. In fact, the term conflict was used synonymously with the term violence and destructions (Robbins, 1989). The traditional administrative theory has been strongly biased in favor of the ideal of a smooth running organization characterized by harmony, unity, coordination, efficiency and order. They seek to achieve this

through happy and congenial work group and control and strong organization control (Owens, 1998).

The old line, traditional approach views conflict as something to be avoided, something caused by personality conflict or a failure of leadership and something that should be resolved only by separating physically the conflicting parts or by a superior's intervention (Szilagyi & Wallace, 1983). According to Swart (1998), most principals have traditionally viewed conflict as a problem to be avoided, whereas, Stoner and Freeman (1989) argue that the traditional view of conflict was that, conflict was unnecessary and harmful. They believed that conflict would develop only when principals failed to apply conflict management principles.

In supporting to the above idea, Plankett & Attner (1989), have stated that, a manager may view conflict as unnecessary and harmful to an organization. If this is the philosophical foundations of the managers toward conflict, their reaction would be to fear its occurrence and they attempt to eliminate all evidence of conflict. The earlier approach to conflict held that conflict was avoidable and was caused by agitators and trouble makers. So managers were expected to "stick to the book" on rules and regulation and to blame someone for conflict (Ayalew, 2000).

According to Luthan's (1981), the traditional approach of organizational conflict was based on the following assumptions. These are: conflict is by definition avoidable; conflict is caused by trouble makers, boat rockers and prima donnas; legalistic forms of authority such as going through channels or "sticking to the book" are emphasized and scope goals are accepted as inevitable. School administrators and board of education in general try to avoid conflict. This is understandable because conflict makes administrators and board members feel uncomfortable and excessive conflict may cause breakdown (entropy) in the school system. Some conflicts in a school system are destructive and should be avoided if possible (Morphet, Johns & Reller, 1982). Even conflict becomes dangerous and disruptive when principals try to avoid it rather than manage it. The more conflict develops, the more bitter the conflict becomes, and the less easy it is to achieve a solution and/or manage it (Everard & Morris, 1990).

2.2 The Constructionist View of Conflict

According to the current or constructionist point of view, conflict in organizations like school are inevitable and even necessary no matter how the school is designed and operated (Stoner & Others, 1989). Murphy (1994), suggests that principal have begun to realize that conflict has positive and negative aspects. Desirable educational innovations are frequently sparked by conflict. Interactions among different elements of a living social system frequently accompanied by conflict are the political activities that keep a school system in a state of dynamic equilibrium. A state of dynamic equilibrium facilitates the attainment of desirable organizational goals and also the satisfaction of the member of the system. Therefore, conflict in a social system may be beneficial as well as destructive (Morphet, Johns & Reller, 1982).

Additionally, Everard and other (1990), suggests that conflict in the sense of an honest opinion is not only unavailable but can also be a valuable aspect of life. It helps to make sure that many alternatives are considered and additional courses of action may be generated from the discussion of already available alternatives. According to the Constructionist perspective, the opinion that a conflict free, harmonious and cooperative organization tends to become stagnant and no responsive to change and advancement. They suggest that not only accepting conflict but also encouraging it. Therefore, it is necessary for managers to interject minimum level of conflict to maintain an optimal level of organizational performance. They suggest conflict is necessary condition for both individual and organizational progression. They encourage managers to embrace conflict and use it for continuous transformation (Borisoff and Victor, 1998).

2.3. Types of Conflict

In this section of the study, different types of conflict will be discussed to give a clear understanding of how the divergent types of conflict influence an organization such as a school. Different scholars and educators have categorized the types of conflict differently based on their perspectives and views toward conflict. Szilagyi and Wallace (1983) identified four types of conflict as seen from at least two perspectives in organizations: level and form. These are: (1) Intrapersonal conflict (conflict within one individual) (2) Interpersonal conflict (where two individuals disagree on some matter or issue. (3) Inter-group conflict (conflict within one group and (4) Inter-group conflict (between two or more groups). These categories are based on the level of organizations.

The same writers are based on the forms of organization also identifies four types of conflict. These are: (1) Goal conflict, where one person or group wants a different goal or act come than others; (2) Cognitive conflict, when one person or group holds ideas or opinions that are incompatible with others; (3) Affective conflict, when one person's or group's feelings or emotions (attitudes) are incompatible with others; and (4) Behavioral conflict, when one person or group does something that is unacceptable to others. Hanson (1996) identified twelve levels of organizational conflict. These are: Intra-role conflict, inter-role conflict, intradepartmental conflict, Interdepartmental conflict. Intra-organizational conflict, organization-environment conflict, Intrapersonal conflict, Interpersonal conflict, Intra – group conflict, Inter-group conflict, inter-informal system conflict and

informal system environmental conflict.

The writer also identified the following three condition which results in these levels (types) of conflicts: (1) Interaction within and between formal organizational levels, (2) Interaction within and between informal organizational levels, and (3) Interaction between formal and informal organizational levels. Gordon (1987) identified three levels of conflict: intrapersonal and Interpersonal, intra group and inter-group, and intra organizational and inter organizational conflict. Luthans (1981) also identified two types of conflict. These are: (1) Intrapersonal conflict, which includes frustration, goal conflict, role conflict and ambiguity, and (2) Interpersonal conflict which results when two or more persons are interacting with one another.

Nevertheless, as various researchers have identified that school conflicts could be stratified on the basis of individual, group and organization at which they occur. In this regard, teacher– principal conflicts might be leveled out, as intrapersonal, interpersonal, intra-group and intergroup conflicts. These common types of organizational conflicts have been explained in detail here under (Rahim, 1986).

2.3.1. Intrapersonal Conflicts

It is conflicts with-in the individual and is called intra individual conflict. At one time or another, every employee experiences conflict with-in him/ her. A person may have conflicting goals, may lack the required ability for a particular job, the path may be blocked by other people, lack of facilities, rules and regulations etc. Regardless of the source, these conflicts can cause frustrations, tension and anxiety. In fact, there is no perfect job that provides total satisfaction. All jobs entail some degree of stress and some tension may be considered desirable. However, if the tension, anxiety and frustration are too great, serious potential harm may follow (Rashid, 1983). It is a conflict that occurs when a school member is required to perform certain tasks and roles, which do not match his/her expertise, interests, goals and values (Rahim, 1986).

Hanson (1998) described, in the contact of school administrators, intrapersonal conflict often is caused by poor time management, underestimation or overestimation of skills and assigned tasks that don't match goals, interests, values or abilities. The same writer identified additional causes such as inability to say no to requests, lack of self-confidence and the perception of lack of control (Locus of control) and limited requisite authority to handle assigned organizational responsibility. In addition, Kroon (1991) explained that, conflict within the individual (intrapersonal) refers to the presence of simultaneous, opposing, divergent and conflicting ideas, feelings and activities. Characteristics of such tension are uncertainty, hesitation, stress, anxiety, depression and insomnia (lack of sleeping). For instance, a principal might be task oriented at the expense of human relations. This can cause stress within the principal if he /she has to decide whether to admonish and educator whose work is not up to standard.

2.3.2 Interpersonal Conflict

Occurs when two people have incompatible needs, goals, or approaches in their relationships. The source of this type of conflict is communication breakdown and learning communication skills valuable in preventing and resolving such difficulties (Fisher, 2000). Interpersonal conflict is broadly defined as disagreements, incompatible interest concerning goals, policies, rules and discordant behavior that creates anger, distrust, fear and rejections. This is the most common and visible type of divergence in schools and other organizations. Interpersonal conflicts in an organization like a school are not often so visible. The origins of such conflict can also lie outside the school organization (Westhuizen, 1991).

In addition, it is a conflict which occurs between one individual and another or between an individual and the group to which he/she belongs or between different groups within an organization. Most employees are concerned about their position, status, power etc within the organization and resent any encroachment on them and competing with each other for recognition, approval and promotion (Rashid, 1983). Different authors /educators and researchers have identified different reasons for the causes/ sources of interpersonal conflicts. Accordingly, Kinard (1988), have identified the primary sources of such conflict in to three: (1) Personality difference, (2) Power struggles and (3) Competition Hellriegel and Slocum (1982, p. 654) identified the following causes of interpersonal conflicts. These are: (1) Disagreement over policies, practices, plans and (2) emotional issues involving negative feelings such as anger, distrust, fear, rejection and resentment.

2.3.3 Intra-group Conflict

It refers to disagreements of differences among the members of a group or its subgroups regarding the goals, functions or activities of the group. In education, it is developed when two members find themselves seeking promotion to a single job. The relationship of these two individuals can often become troubled and embittered. The group itself can become conflictual if and when the various members begin to join the ranks in support of one member or the other (Hanson, 1996).

Saddler (1998) describes intra-group conflict as largely interpersonal conflict between people in a group. Interpersonal conflict is always present in groups because individuals differ in terms of values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors. As a result, the degree of relationship and working together effectively varies from group to groups: However, conflicts in small group can play a constructive role by stimulating creativity and renewal in that they start to communicate and work together as a unit. Fader (1976) identified the major factors that cause

such type of conflicts. These are: leadership style, group composition and size, group cohesiveness and think and external threats and their outcomes.

2.3.4. Inter-group Conflicts

Inter-group conflict is the conflict that occurs between different groups in the school, such as different departments when they are competing for different scarce resources such as number of educators, time allocation, textbooks and other teaching- learning materials, equipment, aids and etc (Vander Bank, 1995). Hellriegel& Slocum (1982) describe inter-group conflict as differences and clashes between groups, departments, or division within an organization. The writers further identified the following causes of inter-group conflict.

These are: (1). Task interdependency, (2) Task dependencies, (3). Inconsistent performance criteria and rewards, (4) Inter-group differences, and (5) Problems in sharing scarce common resources. Similarly, organ and Bateman (1991, p.505) identified three major causes of inter-group conflict in organizations (1) The need for joint decision making, (2) The difference in goals (multiple goals exists within the same organization) and (3) Organizational goals are subjective and are open to different interpretations (differences in perception) Additionally, Kinard (1988, p.309) has identified four primary causes or sources of inter-group conflicts. These are: (1) Scarce resources, (2) Communication problems, (3) Conflicting interest and (4) Task overlap.

2.4. Effects of Conflicts on Performance

Conflict is an inevitable fact of human existence. It is inevitable in any organization where individual and groups interact to produce complex outputs. It can often be destructive at one time and it may be constructive at other time. It is well understood and managed effectively; it can improve both satisfaction and productivity of the social relationship of people. Therefore, conflict can result in to destructive or constructive outcomes depending on the approach taken to treat it (Fisher, 2000). Conflict is not always destructive; it may be a motivator. When it is destructive however, managers need to understand and do something to deal with it. A rational process for dealing with conflict should be programmed and include a planned action response on the part of the manager or organization, rather than relying on a simple reaction or a change that occurs without specific action by the management (Lilaroja, 2010) Cooperative procedures involving group operation will very frequently result in conflict both within a group and among different groups. This is especially true if the membership of a group was deliberately selected to represent different points of view. However, conflict itself if properly understood and handled, may present an opportunity for growth. Therefore, conflict can either be constructive or destructive (Follet in Morphet, Johns &Rellar, 1982) Hellriegel& Slocum (1982) view conflict in a balanced manner. That is, conflict has both constructive and destructive aspects and hence it has to be managed effectively. Because proper management will minimize the destructive effects and maximize the productive effect of conflict.

2.4.1. Negative Effects/Outcomes of Conflict

The negative (Dysfunctional) conflict occurs when the interaction between two or more parties hinders the achievements of the goals or objectives of the other party. Some conflicts are so severe, long lasting that they drain of energy and resources of the organization. It negatively influences the physical and emotional well-being of the individuals involved. It involves strong emotional forces of involvement, self-esteem, beliefs, and values and causes feelings of anxiety, guilt, frustration, hostility, distorted perception, negative stereotyping, decreased communication, lack of trust, decreased cooperation, decreased cohesion and productivity (Ayalew, 2000).

Frequent and powerful hostility arising from conflict can have a devastating impact on the behavior of people in the organization. It can result into psychological and physical withdrawals such as alienation, apathy, indifference, absence, tardiness and turnover as consequences of severe conflict (Owens, 1998). Szilagy and Wallace (1983) identified the flowing negative effect of conflict between the conflicting groups. These are: (1) Hostility and negative attitude increase, (2) Negative stereotypes become dominant, (3) Communication between groups decreases and (4) the other groups activities are closely monitored to check for illegal activities that serve to verify the negative stereotypes. Hunt (1999), lists about six consequences of the negative effects of conflict. These are: (1) prevent members from seeing task at all, (2) Dislocate the entire groups and produce polarizations, (3) subvert the objectives in favor of sub-goals, (4) Lead people to use defensive and blocking behavior, (5) Result in the disintegration of the entire group and (6) stimulate a win-lose conflict. In addition, Lilaroja (2010), identified the following negative effects of conflict: divert time and energy from the main issues, delay decisions, create deadlock, drive un-aggressive committee members to the sideline, interfere with listening obstruct exploration of more alternatives, decrease or destroy sensitivity, cause members to drop out or resign from committees, arouse anger that disrupts a meeting, interfere with empathy, leave losers resentful, incline underdogs to sabotages, provoke personal abuse and cause defensiveness. Generally, the school like any other organizational institution is a system of social interaction. Conflict is inevitable in any work environment. So, the negative outcomes of conflicts mentioned above in the literature findings can occurs in schools like any other organizations. However, conflict is not merely destructive but can also a useful tool in stimulating creative solutions to problems. What makes conflict productive or destructive is the way it is handled. The school principals in order to minimize the negative outcomes and maximize the positive outcomes should be competent

and skillful in accepting the unavailability of conflict and its proper management.

2.4.2. Positive Effects /outcomes of Conflict

Conflict is not always bad for an organization or for an individual. Even absence of conflict indicates that the success of the status quo interest, abdication of responsibility, lack of interest or lazy thinking, and the absence of collaborative interaction among the members. So the existence of conflict reflects the fact that a large degree of cooperation present in a well-managed organization (Everaed, Morris & Wilson, 2004 & Ayalew, 2000). Conflict in the sense of an honest difference of opinions resulting from the availability of two or more possible course of action is not only unavoidable but also a valuable part of life. Because of conflict management ensures that different possibilities and courses of actions. If managed, properly in a creative manner, it can result into the satisfaction and growth of the parties involved.

Because it ensures the equitable distribution of resources and power, create large pool of resources and more creative outcomes (Fisher, 2000 and Everard, Moris& Wilson, 2004). Szilagy and Wallace (1983) identified the following four positive effects within conflicting groups. There are: (1) increase cohesiveness between members, (2) group becomes more task oriented, (3) increased emphasis on organization and (4) increased the acceptance of autocratic leadership. Hellriene & Slocum, (1982), explained that, conflict can indicate the need for adjustments in managerial process (such as organizational structure, decision making system, planning) or in behavioral process (such as motivation, communication, leadership pattern).

In addition, conflict provides managers with adequate information about their function and show where corrective actions might be needed. According to Ghaffar (2005) Conflict is often needed. It: (1) helps to raise and address problems, (2) energizes work to be on the most appropriate issues, (3) helps people “be real” it motivate them to participate and (4) helps people learn how to recognize and benefit from their differences. Generally, when properly and effectively managed, conflict can result in the following positive functional effects within and between the groups involved. These are: stimulate creativity, encourage flexibility, increase problem awareness, increased group cohesiveness, increase motivation to improve, improve quality of decision made, increase productivity, improve quality to work, increase loyalty, increase acceptance of autocratic leader, increase emphasis on task accomplishment, decrease tension, more appropriate adjustment of tasks and resources and etc. (Ayalew, 2000). The positive outcomes of conflict should be encouraged for the overall development of the organization and the members of the organization. So, the school principal should be tactic full to interject the productive conflict the organization and to minimize or eliminate the destructive conflict. One should know that, a positive outcome of conflict is the result of good management. Although there are no one best conflict management methods that fits to all situation, the school principals must be able to choose the most appropriate conflict management style for a particular situation to maintain(sustain) the positive outcomes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Haramaya University is highly acknowledged. The authors also wish to thank the Department of Public Administration and Development Management for its Invaluable Support.

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