

# Role of HR in Managing Workplace Conflict and Employee Relations

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## Abstract

Workplace conflict is an inevitable feature of organisational life, arising from differences in communication styles, work pressures, values, and interpersonal dynamics. This research paper examines the role of the Human Resources (HR) department in managing workplace conflict and nurturing healthy employee relations. Based on a primary survey of 115 respondents and an extensive review of over 20 academic studies published between 2001 and 2025, the study investigates conflict prevalence, root causes, and the effectiveness of HR-led interventions. Key findings reveal that 72.8% of employees have experienced workplace conflict — primarily driven by work pressure (37.2%) and communication gaps (40%). While HR is broadly perceived as fair and prompt, a critical gap exists: fewer than half (47%) of employees feel comfortable approaching HR. The paper recommends that HR transition from a reactive conflict-resolver to a proactive organisational partner by building psychological safety, regularising communication training, and investing in preventive frameworks.

**Keywords:** Workplace Conflict, Human Resource Management, Employee Relations, Conflict Resolution, Mediation, Psychological Safety, Employee Engagement.

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## 1. Introduction

Human Resource Management (HRM) has evolved from an administrative function into a strategic cornerstone of organisational governance. Among its many responsibilities, managing workplace conflict and maintaining productive employee relations stand out as especially critical — directly influencing productivity, retention, innovation, and sustainability.

Workplace conflict, broadly defined as any disagreement or incompatibility between individuals or groups within an organisation, is not inherently destructive. Managed constructively, it can stimulate critical thinking and drive innovation. Left unaddressed, however, it exacts a heavy toll: declining morale, absenteeism, high turnover, legal exposure, and lost productivity. HR's role as mediator, policy architect, and cultural steward has therefore never been more consequential.

Employee relations encompass the broader effort to build trust, ensure fair treatment, facilitate open communication, and promote engagement between employees and the organisation. Strong employee relations reduce conflict likelihood, accelerate resolution when disputes arise, and create the psychological safety necessary for peak performance. Despite these well-established principles, many organisations continue to struggle with the practical implementation of HR-led conflict management, leading to suboptimal outcomes. This study investigates the gap between HR's procedural competence and its relational accessibility through primary survey data and a comprehensive literature review.

## 2. Literature Review

Lewin (2001) contrasts Industrial Relations and HR perspectives on conflict, arguing that effective management requires integrating institutional safeguards with organisational problem-solving techniques. Van Gramberg and Teicher (2006) highlight the ethical dilemma of HR managers as mediators: genuine neutrality is structurally impossible given their dual mandate; impartiality guided by an ethical code is the more viable stance.

Saiganesh, Kaveri, and Jayapriya (2024) demonstrate through manufacturing sector research that HR practices, leadership quality, trust, and communication interact to either mitigate or exacerbate conflict. Bhakuni, Rana, and Bhanot (2024) find that organisations with systematic communication training and formal mediation practices report significantly better employee relations outcomes. Kaur (2025) contributes qualitative insights into the dual-role tension HR professionals navigate and emphasises structural boundaries as essential to effective mediation.

Paul (2025) and Vishvapujita et al. (2025) advocate for a hybrid human-AI model: AI tools such as sentiment analysis, predictive analytics, and chatbots augment HR's analytical capacity, while human practitioners retain responsibility for empathetic conflict resolution. Wardani et al. (2024) identify intergenerational differences — particularly between Gen Z and older colleagues

— as a growing source of organisational conflict. Bakare et al. (2024) propose a comprehensive HR and Legal Risk Management Framework integrating conflict resolution with legal compliance, emphasising risk assessment, stakeholder engagement, and continuous monitoring.

## 3. Objectives and Hypotheses

### 3.1 Objectives of the Study

- To determine the prevalence, frequency, and main reasons for conflicts in the workplace.
- To assess the effectiveness of conflict resolution processes led by the HR department.
- To assess the quality of employee relationships, especially in terms of trust and comfort levels towards the HR department.
- To identify the gap between the reactive performance of the HR department and its proactive potential in conflict prevention.
- To develop evidence-based recommendations on how the effectiveness of the HR department as a strategic business partner can be improved.

### 3.2 Hypotheses

H<sub>0</sub>: There exists no statistically significant relationship between HR conflict management strategies and employee outcomes such as satisfaction, engagement, and commitment.

H<sub>1</sub>: Proactive and reactive HR conflict management strategies have a statistically significant positive effect on employee outcomes such as conflict avoidance, satisfaction, and commitment.

## 4. Research Methodology

### 4.1 Research Design

The study adopts a Descriptive Research Design using a Mixed-Methods approach. Quantitative data was collected through a structured 20-question questionnaire administered to 115 respondents across organisations in Gujarat. Analysis employed frequency distribution and percentage analysis.

## 4.2 Data Collection

The primary data collection methods used were an online survey using Google Forms, which targeted employees of various organisations. The questions asked related to employees' experience of workplace conflicts, effectiveness of HR, and employee relationship quality. The secondary data collection methods included academic journals, industry reports published by companies such as KPMG, Deloitte, PwC, and textbooks related to OB and HRM.

## 4.3 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The sample comprised 115 respondents who are working in different organisations. The researcher adopted convenience sampling. The respondents were employees with different levels of experience and different functional positions.

## 5. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data was analyzed with the help of descriptive statistical methods like frequency and percentage analysis. The findings are most important for every hr department presented by tables for better understanding.

**Table 1: Profile of Respondents**

Particular	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Male	79	68.4%
Female	36	30.7%
Other	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>100%</b>

The table indicates that 68.4% of respondents are male and 30.7% are female, ensuring a reasonable gender distribution across the sample.

**Table 2: Work Experience Profile**

Experience Level	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Fresher	17	23.7%
1–3 Years	29	31.6%
3–5 Years	32	28.1%
Above 5 Years	19	16.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>100%</b>

The data indicates that the majority of the workforce surveyed are early to mid-career professionals, with a significant percentage of employees having less than three years of experience (55.3%). This underlines the importance of HR's role in terms of training young employees to handle conflicts.

**Table 3: Workplace Conflict Prevalence**

Experienced Conflict?	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	83	72.8%
No	31	27.2%
<b>Total</b>	114	100%

From the analysis, it is evident that 72.8% of the respondents have experienced conflict at their workplaces. This, therefore, means that workplace conflict is a major issue, as it affects a large number of employees, almost three-fourths of the total workforce. **Table 4: Primary Causes of Workplace Conflict.**

Primary Cause	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Work Pressure	42	37.2%
Personal Differences	34	30.1%
Communication Gap	22	19.5%
Management Issues	15	13.3%
<b>Total</b>	113	100%

The data implies that workload and stress are the major contributors to conflict (37.2%), followed by differences in interpersonal relationships (30.1%). This emphasizes the importance for HR to look into workload allocation and introduce team building initiatives. The importance of workload and stress in conflict brings us back to conflict management as an organisational issue.

**Table 5: Frequency of Conflict Occurrence**

Frequency	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Sometimes	49	43.8%
Rarely	31	27.7%
Very Often	27	24.1%
Often	5	4.4%
<b>Total</b>	112	100%

The data suggests a polarised environment where a significant segment of the workforce (approximately 24%) faces chronic conflict. This highlights the need for targeted interventions in high-stress departments.

**Table 6: Impact of Conflict on Work Performance**

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	23	20.2%
Agree	54	47.4%
Neutral	28	24.6%
Disagree	8	7.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>100%</b>

A combined 67.6% of employees agree or strongly agree that conflicts negatively affect their work performance. This establishes a clear business case for investing in conflict management to improve overall organisational productivity.

**Table 7: HR Effectiveness – Prompt Action in Resolving Conflicts**

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	33	28.9%
Agree	44	38.6%
Neutral	27	23.7%
Disagree	10	8.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>100%</b>

67.5% of employees agree or strongly agree that HR takes prompt action in resolving conflicts. The neutral segment (23.7%) indicates room for improvement in communicating actions taken to all employees.

**Table 8: Employee Comfort in Approaching HR**

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	54	47.0%
Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
No	33	28.7%
Sometimes	28	24.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>100%</b>

However, only 47% of the employees feel comfortable approaching HR to share their problems. Interestingly, 28.7% said 'No', which reflects a huge trust gap. This also emphasizes the importance of the HR having an open-door policy and humanizing their interactions to make the employees feel comfortable.

**Table 9: Overall Satisfaction with HR's Role in Managing Conflicts**

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Very Satisfied	32	28.3%
Satisfied	41	36.3%
Neutral	26	23.0%
Dissatisfied	14	12.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>100%</b>

64.6% of respondents expressed satisfaction with HR's role in managing conflicts. However, the 12.4% dissatisfaction rate requires attention to identify specific pain points and improve HR's responsiveness and accessibility.

## 6. Findings and Discussion

### 6.1 Findings

Based on responses collected from 115 employees, the following key findings emerge from the study:

- Workplace conflict is highly prevalent, with 72.8% of employees reporting personal experience of conflict and 24.1% encountering it 'very often', underscoring the need for systematic HR intervention.
- Work pressure is the primary driver of conflict (37.2%), followed by personal differences (30.1%) and communication gaps (19.5%) — indicating that conflict management requires addressing structural workload issues, not merely interpersonal dynamics.
- A combined 67.6% of employees confirm that workplace conflict negatively affects their work performance, establishing a strong business case for organisational investment in conflict prevention.
- HR is broadly perceived as responsive and fair: 67.5% agree HR takes prompt action, 65.5% feel HR listens carefully, and 64% consider HR's dispute resolution methods to be fair.
- A critical 'Competence-Connection Gap' exists: employees respect HR's procedural efficiency but fewer than half (47%) feel comfortable approaching HR, and only 55.7% feel encouraged to report conflicts.
- Preventive HR performance is weak: communication training is available to fewer than half the workforce (48.7%) and counselling services are unavailable or invisible to over 52% of employees.

### 6.2 Discussion

The comparison between HR's reactive effectiveness and its relational accessibility reveals an important insight: procedural competence does not guarantee relational trust. While employees acknowledge that HR acts promptly and fairly when disputes are formally raised, the low approachability scores suggest that a significant proportion of conflicts never reach HR in the first place. This suppresses early intervention and allows tensions to escalate unnecessarily.

The dominance of work pressure as the leading conflict driver shifts the strategic imperative from behavioural training alone to organisational design. Workload audits, realistic deadline policies, and stress management programmes address the root cause rather than its symptoms. This finding aligns with Saiganesh et al. (2024), who identify workload management as a primary lever in employee relationship management.

The persistent trust deficit — where employees view HR as an efficient process- manager rather than a trusted confidant — reflects the dual-mandate tension identified by Van Gramberg and Teicher (2006) and Kaur (2025).

Addressing this requires structural changes such as confidentiality protocols and anonymous reporting mechanisms, alongside relational investments through informal HR- employee interactions not associated with disciplinary processes.

## 7. Conclusion

The present study aimed to analyse the role of HR in managing workplace conflict and employee relations based on survey responses from 115 employees. The findings confirm that workplace conflict is widespread (72.8%), productivity- damaging (67.6% performance impact), and primarily structural in nature — driven by work pressure rather than purely interpersonal friction.

HR's reactive capabilities are credible: approximately two-thirds of employees rate HR as prompt, fair, and attentive. However, a significant cultural challenge remains

— the Competence-Connection Gap. Employees respect HR as a process manager but do not experience it as a proactive partner. Preventive programming is underdeveloped, counselling services are invisible to the majority, and fewer than half the workforce feels safe approaching HR.

The study concludes that HR must evolve from a reactive dispute-resolver to a proactive organisational partner — building psychological safety, auditing workloads, regularising communication training, and making itself genuinely accessible. Organisations that invest in HR as a strategic, trust-building function will achieve decisive advantages in retention, engagement, and overall performance.

## 8. Future Scope

Future studies can also expand this research by using a larger and more diverse demographic pool to make it more generalizable. Studies that investigate the

dynamics of conflict frequency and the evolution of HR's effectiveness over time can also yield more in-depth results. Advanced statistical techniques such as regression analysis and structural equation modeling can also investigate causality in the relationship between HR's interventions and their effects on employees.

Other techniques such as in-depth interview studies with HR managers and employees can also yield rich experiential data. Other studies can also investigate the effects of AI-powered conflict detection technologies and hybrid workplaces on conflict dynamics.

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