

The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Managing Workplace Conflict

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Abstract - Today's workplaces have cultural and regional diversities more than any other time in modern history. With all the differences in the perceptions, preferences, and personalities of individuals at some point facing a workplace conflict is inevitable. Therefore, all organizations need to prepare themselves for the unpredictable nature of workplace conflict. The effectiveness of conflict management is deeply interconnected with the emotional intelligence level of individuals. It is so crucial for managers to have a decent level of emotional intelligence to deal with minor and large workplace conflicts. Managers with higher emotional intelligence can identify and understand others' thought processes and act accordingly. Conflict management is a challenging task for senior management due to its complex and challenging nature. The effectiveness of conflict management is directly related to the fluid operation of all the team operations in every organization. There are several elements that affect the efficiency of conflict management practices. This paper tries a critical analysis of the role of emotional intelligence in workplace conflict management. Following a brief overview of the individual's emotional intelligence in the workplace by highlighting previous works on the subject matter. Throughout, an attempt is made to find the influence of emotional intelligence in conflict management policies and practices in the workplace. This paper concludes by pointing out the importance of understanding emotional intelligence and how organizations can effectively link this to the smooth management of workplace conflict.

Key Words: Conflict Management, Emotional Intelligence, Workplace Conflict

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's highly competitive global market every element of the organization is critical for success. One of those components is effective management of workplace conflict. According to Mauersberger task conflict is the most common in the workplace. Task conflict is the type of conflict that arise when team members argue over the best methods of completing a specific task. Conflict arises from interactions between humans. Since operations of any organization happen through the interactions of employees. (Adamu Isa, Ahmed. 2015). That's why some levels of conflict are inevitable in any organization. Emotional expression is the main element of conflict management. Managers' conflict management approach is affected by their emotional intelligence level. (Ting-Toomey et al. 2001). All organizations desire to have a human resource that possesses higher emotional intelligence. (Haleem, Fazal & et al. 2018).

The concept of emotional intelligence has received unprecedented interest, especially in how it is linked with workplace behavior. Business schools incorporated the subject into their curriculum. (Mehta, Sandhya, et al. 2013). Emotional Intelligence is an important factor in the success of an organization since it is the ability of employees to interact well. Emotional intelligence creates a concrete foundation for employee relations that encourage trust, group morale, and team performance allowing employees to work with conflict. It is vital for any manager to understand how emotional intelligence influences conflict resolution. (Wong et al. 1992). A study conducted among Indian service sector employees found that only 16% of the employees in the companies have higher emotional intelligence while 36% of employees with low EI and 48% of employees exhibit a moderate level of EI. This survey result shows the necessity for companies to improve their HR training programs with the inclusion of the emotional intelligence module. (Sinha, Deepti. 2016).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Important of emotional intelligence skills is increasing in the workplace. Managers' abilities cannot merely rely on the Intelligence quotient and other practical skills. A workplace can become more effective and efficient through successful social interactions. A company is one of the social environments in which emotional intelligence plays a greater significant place (Langley, 2000). Another study found that managers with higher emotional intelligence higher empathetic standpoint in a workplace decision-making situation. This will help employees to develop cooperation and job satisfaction (Schutte, 2001). The early definition of Emotional intelligence in as the ability of a person to deal with his or her emotions (Salovey and Mayer, 1990). Emotional intelligence abilities can be divided into four parts: the ability to observe an emotion, use emotion to enable the thought, ability to recognize and manage emotions (Mayer et al. 2004). Davies et al. (1998) theorized emotional intelligence has four discrete dimensions. The first one is evaluation and the manifestation of emotion in the self (self-emotional appraisal); the second is understanding and acknowledgment of emotion in other people (others' emotional appraisal); The third one is the ability to control self-emotion, and the last one is the use of emotion to ease the performance.

Conflict begins when an individual observes the other has frustrated or is about to frustrate, by some act of that person" (Thomas, 1976). The broad definition of conflict is "an interactive process demonstrated in inharmoniousness, differences in opinions, or disagreement within or between others" (Rahim, 2002). An efficient workplace conflict management in an organization can get the most desired organizational outcomes such as equality, job satisfaction, mutual understanding, and performance boost (Jameson, 1999). There is a positive correlation between the emotional intelligence level of employees and their ability to work efficiently in a team (Caruso and Salovey, 2004). Employees

with high emotional intelligence are more adaptive to handling workplace conflict. (Lopes et al., 2006).

Conflict Management

Conflict refers to some form of resistance or difference in opinions arising between employees when the perceptions or actions of one party are either disagreed by or unacceptable to the other party. Conflict is related to the opposite thoughts and practices of different employees. Conflict is an inevitable outcome of the employee's interactions. Chances of conflicts are high in companies that are filled with people from many backgrounds, cultures, and perceptions. If managers can channel conflict situations into a positive cohesive outcome, then companies would become more successful. (Tschannen-Moran, 2001)

In companies with modern inclusive organizational structure managing workplace conflict is a major challenge for managers. An early study shows that managers spend 20% of their working time dealing with workplace conflicts (Thomas, et al. 1976). Not every conflict happening in organizations are bad. Some of them have a positive outcome which actually helps team members to work efficiently. Conflicts in an organization can be parted into functional and dysfunctional conflicts. Functional conflict can trigger innovation, enhance creativity and stimulate growth. This type of conflict can find a collective team solution for complex problems. After going through the functional conflict management process managers and team members will create a synergy within them which will help to achieve more goals in the future. Dysfunctional conflicts always create stress and job dissatisfaction among employees. The relationship between managers and employees will be negatively affected and it can cause distrust as well as diminishing performance quality. An increase in dysfunctional conflicts is the nightmare of any manager since it will eventually corrupt the integrity of the team (Rahim, M. & Psenicka, 2003).

Conflict Management Style

According to the Conflict Mode Instrument created by Thomas and Kilmann, there are 5 major conflict management styles. Each management style is unique and different in its own way and according to the situation, managers can apply any of these methods which they find most appropriate. Managers need proper training to understand when and how to apply each conflict management style.

Collaborating Style: This conflict management style is used a higher level of assertiveness and cooperativeness happens in the situation. This style will create a win-win result when both parties can get what they desired with the least negative feeling. Managers will choose this style when they look for a long-term relationship with other parties.

Competing Style: When Managers don't need a long-term relationship they go for a competing style. This is the situation when assertiveness is high and cooperativeness is low. Only one side will win here and the other side will lose. Managers only use this style when it is an absolute necessity since it affects the relationship with others.

Avoiding Style: It is the type of style used when managers need to evade or withdraw from the conflict scenario at the moment. It can be dealt with later or the matter will solve itself in time. We can say it is a loose-loose scenario by considering the time constraint.

Accommodating Style: This is the exact opposite of a competing style. In this scene, managers try to please the

concerned party by sacrificing their own interests. This is a lose-win situation where managers focus on the interest and long-lasting relationship with the parties.

Compromising Style: In this style, both managers and concerned parties will partially satisfy each other by maintaining some level of assertiveness and cooperativeness. This is the most unique situation with lose some-win some for both parties. Even though both parties are not completely satisfied with the result they accept the outcome and move on. (Thomas et al. 1976).

Emotional Intelligence

For many years human resource researchers tried to understand the reason why managers with higher Intelligence Quotients could not always deliver successful conflict management practices in companies (Salovey, Mayer.1990). During the 1980s scholars from psychology and management focused to learn more about the skills for managers that are necessary to enhance the relationship with employees without compromising the organizational goal while dealing with workplace conflict. In 1990, psychologists John Mayer and Peter Salovey developed the concept of Emotional Intelligence. They described it as an individual's understanding of emotions as well as the ability to utilize them for the common good. By taking inspiration from this study Daniel Goleman wrote the book titled Emotional Intelligence in 1995. In this book, Goleman is not underestimating the emotional quotients but he is arguing the intellect of managers alone is not helpful in workplace conflict management.

Elements of Emotional Intelligence

To understand and manage emotions of self as well as people surrounding us need a special kind of skillset which is emotional intelligence. This is what Managers need to facilitate an efficient workplace culture by resolving the conflict without hurting employees' feelings. Goleman expanded previews four branch elements and created five essential elements of emotional intelligence.

Self-Awareness: It is associated with the ability to be mindful of different emotional states and cognitive impulses of the mind. By considering the impact those mental states have on employees' managers can act wisely while dealing with the conflict.

Self-Regulation: It is the capability of a mind to have control over emotions and impulses. Self-regulated managers can keep calm in any complicated conflict scenario and make a decision with a peaceful mindset.

Motivation: It is the capacity of the mind to keep track of achieving goals despite the hurdles along the way. No matter how difficult the conflict management process is motivated management can find a solution at the end of the day.

Empathy: It is one's ability to understand the situation others are in and make inclusive actions. An empathic manager will be able to understand the employees' side of the incident and make a compassionate decision.

Social Skills: Most fundamental skill for a manager is the ability to deal with the problems of all the employees under him/her. Social skill is necessary to interact with employees to enhance collaboration and to handle any conflict with utmost diplomacy. (Goleman, D. 1995).

Role of Emotional Intelligence in Conflict Management

By linking the studies on emotional intelligence and conflict management styles we can find that managers need to have a higher level of emotional intelligence in order to manage workplace conflict efficiently. While making final decisions managers need to consider the delicate situation of a long-term relationship with the team members. It is clear from the study that the emotional intelligence level of the managers affects selecting the conflict management style and the quality of the resolution process. The significance of emotional intelligence in managing workplace conflict has been strongly highlighted by the previous researchers too. There is a substantial relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict management style and the process of managers. (Abas et al. 2012). One research discovered a positive correlation between emotional intelligence and workplace conflict management. (Lee, F, M. (2003). Employees with higher emotional intelligence have fewer disagreements with other parties while settling the conflict. (Morris,1998).

3. CONCLUSIONS

The primary purpose of this study was to gain insight into the emotional intelligence level of managers in handling workplace conflict. Most existing literature in the field accepts the fact that emotional intelligence clearly affects conflict management style, efficiency, and practices. Managers do need to get proper training and awareness on how emotional intelligence affects situations of workplace conflicts involving all levels of employees. So, we can say that companies should emphasize developing managers' emotional intelligence to overcome any hurdles in managing conflict and creating a positive workplace culture. Managers need to be vigilant of their employees' reactions to conflict while making decisions. Although we have an understanding of the role of the emotional intelligence level of managers in workplace conflict management, very few examined how employees' emotional intelligence level affects the conflict management process and how employees receive decisions taken by the managers.

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