ABSTRACT

The Researcher has been in the Human Resources function for over 21 years. During the last 21 years of his career, the researcher has worked and seen conflicts in various contexts and in different magnitude ranging from violence to strikes. His career exposed the researcher to extremely stressful working conditions as in Bihar/Jharkhand areas and also in extremist naxalite areas. Later in his career, the researcher experienced sociologically driven conflicts pertaining to “sons of soil” issues and also other such Union related conflicts.

The above exposure of the researcher and his ability to successfully steer and safeguard the organizational interests and at the same time work on win-win solutions, created a desire to study and work on the subject of conflict management and align it with an academic perspective. Accordingly, this research took shape under the guidance of Dr. (Capt).C.M. Chitale, who could see a great potential for a useful research, which is very relevant to the Industries.

The study is focused on the aspects of Conflict Management, Inter group behaviours, Conflict management styles & the non conventional approaches, impact of delegation and autonomy in organizations.

Overview of Organizational Conflicts:

Conflict management has received increasing attention in the organizational literature during the last two decades because of a shift in attitudes toward conflict in organizations. The traditional view of conflict as something harmful has changed to a view that sees conflict as a reality of organizational life. S. Robbins (1978) has actually argued that functional levels of conflict are conducive to innovation and higher quality decisions. K. W. Thomas (1976:889) notes that “social scientists are coming to realize--and to demonstrate--that conflict itself is no evil, but rather a phenomenon which can have constructive or destructive effects depending on its management.” Hence, the emphasis has shifted towards an understanding of different styles of managing conflicts.
There are many varied definitions of Conflicts in the Literature. Following are some of them:

- A colloquial definition is that conflict occurs when 2 people try to occupy the same “Space” at the same time. This space could range from the simple case of Physical space, such as the last open seat on a crowded bus, to psychological space, in which each party believes there are incompatibilities in what each party wants. For example, conflict may emerge when 2 members of a group want to be the most powerful member.

- Mr. Thomas Kilmann (1976) offered a good definition as “Conflict is the process which begins when one party perceives that the other party is frustrated or is about to frustrate, some concern of his”

The general assumption is that conflicts tend to have negative consequences for both the individual and the Organization. For example, for any employee, in an intense conflict situation, his state of mind will be disturbed – tense, uneasy and unable to concentrate on his work. Naturally in such situations, his Performance is adversely affected. Decisions made may not be appropriate. Occasionally, they might even be unrealistic or irrational.

Thus conflicts tend to impair one’s efficiency. Sometimes, conflict is also observed to give rise to certain maladjusted behaviors in individuals trying to cope with it. These include alcoholism, drug abuse, excessive smoking under eating, and extremely aggressive or submissive behaviors.

Apart from psychological & behavioral consequences, conflicts can also have physiological consequences in employees under extreme conditions – such as increase in blood pressure, acidity etc. Collectively the above consequences are detrimental to the organization and hence it is important to understand its implications for Organizational Efficiency.

There is also a very big and significant flip side to conflicts which needs to be considered. A balanced approach is to see conflicts as having the potential of either positive or negative effects, or both, depending on how it is managed in any
Organizational set up. Conflicts, if regarded as a resource which enables us constant new learning, new knowledge and a potential growth and development of organization.

We observe that the progress that we have made so far in our civilization is due to the conflict between Man and Nature. Conflict generates Energy at every level of Human activity – energy that can produce constructive results. Conflicts tend to have a motivational value; they drive or energise an individual to tackle a situation. To resolve a conflict one might explore different avenues or alternatives of action, which make him/her more knowledgeable. Often conflicts provide an opportunity to test one’s abilities in adverse conditions.

While successful resolution of conflicts adds to one’s self confidence, unsuccessful attempts, makes one more realistic & resourceful to seek better alternatives and thereby improves one’s skills. As an example very often when we recall past issues and the problems/stress we underwent to manage those issues, now if reviewed seems much easier to handle. They appear much simple and we have the confidence to handle them now. This is due to one’s learning from past and thereby as we mentioned earlier makes us more confident and knowledgeable.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The researcher reviewed various literature on Conflicts and articles on this subject. Some of the relevant literature is commented here. Mr. Amarendra Bhusan in his article “Conflict Behavior in an organization” analyses the good and bad of conflicts in an organization, and some of the dynamics and outcomes of Organizational conflicts.

The Ph.D Thesis summary of Ms. Nandini S. from IIM Calcutta in 2000, shows research on Organizational performance, considering the effect of both positive aspects of conflicts and also the negative aspects in the role of Top Management. Till then, earlier Researchers have focused their attention either exclusively on conflicts, debate, disagreements etc., or solely on the presence and impact of positive communication, Social integration etc. The study argues that the heterogeneity present in Top Management Team will manifest itself in the form of Task Conflicts only when Managers exercise high degree of discretion while making Organizational decisions.
Thus, Top Management Team heterogeneity will have positive impact on Organizational performance when it is moderated by Task conflict & Collaborative conflict management process. This research drew data from 213 top managers across 41 companies from the Indian Software Industry.

In the Proposed Research proposal, it was felt that the above research by Ms. Nandini, had its limitations of study in Software Industry only and its findings can get Validated in Manufacturing Industry also, along with the other hypotheses.

In the another study titled, an Examination between the Relationships of Conflict Management Styles and Employees’ Satisfaction, by Kim Lian Lee (Corresponding author) Faculty of Management & Information Technology, University College Sedaya International, Malaysia, the study examined the relationships between conflict handling styles and subordinates’ satisfaction with supervision.

Data from 139 respondents from major industries in Malaysia including service, manufacturing, mining and construction demonstrated that subordinates were more satisfied with their superiors’ supervision through their exercise of integrating, Compromising, and obliging styles. On the other hand, subordinates who perceived their superiors as primarily utilizing dominating and Avoiding style viewed them as incompetent in supervision and thus lowering their level of job satisfaction. (International Journal of Business and Management September, 2008)

Dr. Nadine Campbell Ph.D., from University of Western Sydney in her study titled Conflict, Stress and the Workplace, illustrates the coalescence of interpersonal, interpersonal, intra group and intergroup dynamic with it the context of work by making clear distinctions between positive and negative stress that can impact on the health of individuals in the workplace. In particular, the debates surrounding individual and organizational factors are examined to better determine the level of stress experienced and the resulting psychological, physiological and behavioral symptoms. Two types of conflict were examined in this article: relationship conflict and task conflict. Relationship conflict exists when there are interpersonal incompatibilities among group members, which typically includes tension, animosity, and annoyance among members within a group. Task conflict exists when there are disagreements among group members about
the content of the tasks being performed, including differences in viewpoints, ideas, and opinions.

Mr. Rex C. Mitchell, Ph.D. in his article Constructive Management of Conflicts in Groups speaks of various Conflict Models and modifications to the Thomas model (1976). He also considers that Conflicts occur in cycles or episodes (Baxter, 1982; Pondy, 1967; Walton, 1969). Each episode is influenced by the outcomes of previous episodes and also influences future episodes.

Thomas and Kilmann (1974) developed a useful model of conflict response modes. They categorized a person’s orientation in two dimensions: the person’s emphasis on satisfying his or her own concerns and the emphasis on satisfying the concerns of the other. This scheme is used to describe ways that group members and leaders behave in response to conflict, thus providing a helpful tool for facilitating resolution of conflicts. Thomas and Kilmann defined five dominant orientations or modes of dealing with conflicts - Competing, Accommodating, Collaborating, Compromising and Avoiding. For the current study, the Researcher found this a very relevant model and has used the Thomas Kilmann tool in the questionnaire and analysis thereafter. Similar modes of response to conflict earlier have been given by Blake and Mouton (1964) and by Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) also.

A study by Mr.Kim Lian Lee, from Faculty of Management & Information Technology, University College Sedaya International, KL, Malaysia, titled an Examination between the Relationships of Conflict Management Styles and Employees’ Satisfaction, has been referred by the researcher in the International Journal of Business Management, September 2008 issue, pages 11-25. This research analyzes in general the distribution of conflict handling styles, and its consequences in terms of subordinates’ satisfaction with superior supervision in Malaysian companies.

The conflict management styles were also found to be associated to an individual perception’s of the source of conflict style. Superior who was perceived to exercise dominating style tends to exercise greater management control – giving little opportunity for the subordinate to be personally responsible for a meaningful portion of his/her works. In assessing the effectiveness of the various influence means, the results
suggested that integrating, Compromising and obliging should be emphasized to ensure subordinates’ satisfaction with supervision. Dominating style should be minimized in any influence attempt except in situations that call for such approach, such as time of crisis or low performance.

The researcher had depended on available literature UoP Library, in the websites which are subject based and also referred to the websites of Educational Institutes offering e-research facilities such as Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In this Section, the researcher proposed to elaborate on “HOW” aspects of the study based on the understanding of the literature survey. The researcher got insights into definitive part, and outcome of earlier research.

The researcher formulated following objectives for the primary research study.

**Objectives of this research**

1. To study and analyze the Conflict Management Styles adopted by the 1st Level Managers in Manufacturing Organizations.

2. To assess the impact of Conflict Management Style on Organizational Effectiveness. By Organizational effectiveness the researcher had identified following parameters –
   a) Employee Satisfaction
   b) Attrition Level
   c) Positive Outcome of Conflict
   d) Development of the Organization in terms of New Innovations
   e) Constructive Changes / Improvements.

3. To explore the changes in Conflict Management Styles and its effect of change in Work Environment and further investigate the impact on Conflict Management Styles.
4. To investigate the impact of Integrating and Differentiating Factors of work environment in the Organization.

5. To identify the possibility of influence of third party or external forces and their role in Conflict Resolution.

6. To suggest most appropriate Conflict Resolution to be method adopted while dealing with the young work force.

**Research Design**

The researcher had identified, defined and delineated the variables of the study. The study is related to establish relationship between the variables.

The descriptive research design was thought to be the most appropriate research design.

In order to arrive at conclusion, findings, the researcher collected the data from various sources viz.:

a) **Primary Data**

1) **Cases**: Based on the experience, expertise of the researcher 3 cases was constructed which were related to researcher’s observation. These cases are presented and analyzed.

2) **Questionnaire**: was designed and deployed to evolve responses from practicing Top Managers in manufacturing companies. Questionnaires were drafted keeping in mind the objectives of this study. The Questionnaire had 3 sections. Section Opening pertains to the profile of the respondents and the organization.

- **Section A** had 43 questions with multiple choice and 7 point Likert scale to respond. 1 question in the end required a brief explanation. In this section 4 questions pertained to Indication of Conflicts, 8 questions on Conflict Resolution process, 2 questions on Employee Dissatisfaction, 4 questions on Integration of Conflict in Management Strategy, 12 questions on Open Culture/freedom of Expression, 6 questions on Involvement on Decision making process and 3 questions on Outcome of Conflicts.

- **Section B** had 13 questions on Discretion and Delegation of Authority.
- **Section C** was related to the Thomas Kilmann Instrument/tool, to measure the Conflict Management style.

3) **Data from the Human Resources Department** of the companies where Questionnaires were deployed. There were related to the annual turnover of the company and the attrition levels of White Collar.

b) **Secondary Data**

Various journals, books and magazines that are available at the PUMBA Library were referred to. Further, reference was taken of the Thomas Kilmann tool and literature in the e-format.

**Sampling method & Sample size:**

The concept of Conflict was very sensitive given the nature of subject research. It rested on the perception of the identified respondents and their perception, attitude, beliefs, opinions. Further, it was important from the study point of view to have appropriate questions which the respondents were willing to disclose and share.

The universe of the study being very large say almost infinite, it was not possible to collect the data from the all the Organization’s. The researcher had to resort to sampling techniques given the constraints of availability of time, geographical constraints, and willingness of the respondents to share information.

Researcher was aware that conflicts are integral part of any organization and organizations large or small, were very sensitive to Conflict Resolution Methods, and had hesitation when sharing information related to conflict management.

Although the researcher had planned to conduct probability sampling, because the factors mentioned above, the researcher had to restore to non probability Convenient Sampling. Therefore, in the organization where the respondents were willing to share information and were also willing to complete the questionnaires were contacted. The Researcher was able to collect data from 45 companies and the total respondents to the questionnaires were 221.
The Researcher used the Convenience Sampling method. Non-Probability samples that are restricted are called Convenience Sample. It is one of the methods of Non-Probability Sample.

The researcher took care to make sure that most of the 1st level functional managers were covered and have positively responded so that the Top management perspective is well captured by a true representation of all 1st level Managers.

**Defining the Universe:**

The universe for this study was manufacturing companies primarily in western India. In order to get the data from professionally managed companies, data was collected from Private Limited, MNC’s and Public Limited Companies which are not proprietary in nature.

**Profile of the Sampled Organizations:**

The researcher as mentioned earlier had a long association with manufacturing companies in various levels in the hierarchy. Hence, due to his confidence in the subject based on his exposure to various conflict situations, the Researcher has oriented his study to Manufacturing Companies primarily in Western India but has also included some Companies in North (NCR) Region & few in South of India.

It is common knowledge that in India, Proprietary firms are mostly managed by the individual owner and he manages all the functions. Most of the decisions are taken by the Proprietor and instances of conflict in such environment is minimal as he would ease out such persons who are in disagreement with him or such persons may themselves move out on their own in order to avoid any direct conflict with the proprietor, he being the final authority being the owner.

The dynamics in such firms are quite different and usually the structure is such that the functional competence gap between the proprietor and his next level and further below levels are very steep. The style of management is, usually by giving Instructions and strategy is, as driven by the Proprietor. Delegation is minimal as most decisions are taken
by the Proprietor. Further, it was felt by the researcher that the employees in such organizations may not be very open to share the real situation. Hence, the researcher felt that to get data from professionally managed companies, he should focus on data collection from **Private Limited, MNC’s and Public Limited Companies only.**

**Criteria for Selection:**

Companies were chosen that have a business turnover largely ranging from **150 Cr. to 2000 Cr.** Few (10%) of the companies were in the range of **50 to 150 Cr.** and were selected as they were part of large Multinational Group and had plans to grow their revenue in the coming years to **150 Cr. to 500 Cr.**

Data was collected from organizations which were professionally managed companies and with proper organizational structure which had at least four Functional Heads reporting to the CEO.

**FORMULATION & TESTING OF HYPOTHESES**

The researcher was completely aware about the role of hypotheses in the research. Further he had also accepted the fact that the hypotheses remain the guiding force throughout the study and all activities are aimed at validating the hypotheses. With this background the researcher had formulated following hypotheses, which are tested and validated.

**Hypothesis 1:** The very existence of Conflict Resolution Process leads to better understanding dissatisfaction levels of Employee.

The researcher was of the Opinion that Conflicts were inherent part of any work environment. However, in the presence of a Conflict Resolution Process in the organization, such conflicts tend to take a positive outcome of the perception of the employees satisfaction levels. Researcher also thought it to be an associating factor for the overall Employee Dissatisfaction in the organization.
In order to validate this hypothesis the researcher had identified Q 6 of the questionnaire which sought the opinion of the respondent regarding their agreement to the statement “Are any official Procedures to Resolve Conflict” and Q 27 of the questionnaire in which respondents were requested to rate to the extent to which they agree to the statement “Disagreements/Conflicts in my organization on matters relating to decision taken by Management”.

As the variables Q6, herewith indicated as “V₁” was discrete categorical variable dichotomous variable measured on nominal scale and Q27, herewith indicated as “V₂” was measured on ordinal scale, Chi-Square test was thought to be most appropriate test.

The hypothesis was statistically validated and test and it could be concluded that where there exists Conflict Resolution Process, it leads to better understanding of dissatisfaction of employees. Hence, irrespective of reasons of conflict situations in the Organization, there is a direct association between existence of Conflict Resolution Process and Dissatisfaction of Employees.

**Hypothesis 2:** Appointing external consultant creates disagreements on matters relating to approach of Management to Handle Issues and Decisions taken by Management.

**Hypothesis 2b:** It would also indicate that non involvement in decisions leads indication of conflicts.

It has been seen by the Researcher that many organizations tend to have a preference to appoint consultants to work on many of their projects or issues. These decisions are taken by the top management. The researcher was of the opinion that appointing an external consultant as an advisor in handling grievances and such decisions taken by Management based on consultant’s advise, will create disagreements among the employees.

Employees feel part of the organization when they are involved in decision making process and when decisions are evolved through internal teams and committees, then the employees perceive it to be reasonable and also appropriate. The context of external consultants is valid in this situation also as consultants are perceived as outsiders and not sensitive to manage internal organizational issues as they base their actions &
recommendations by acquired data from the organization. Instead issues can be better managed internally by those who are part of such issues as a Collaborating process.

In order to validate this hypothesis the researcher had identified Q 34 of the questionnaire which sought the opinion of the respondent regarding their agreement to the statement “My Organization prefers to appoint external Consultants to manage the Business Strategy”, Q 27 of the questionnaire in which respondents were requested to rate to the extent to which they agree to the statement “Disagreements/ Conflicts in my organization on matters relating to decision taken by Management” and Q 29 of the questionnaire in which respondents were requested to rate to the extent to which they agree to the statement “I see conflicts more as disagreements on the approach of Management to handle issues.”.

As all the variables Q34, herewith indicated as “V_1”, Q27, herewith indicated as “V_2” and Q29, herewith indicated as “V_3” were discrete categorized variables, measured on ordinal scale, Spearman’s Rank Correlation Coefficient (Rho) was thought to be most appropriate test.

From the above statistical analysis and validation it can be concluded that appointing external consultant creates disagreements on matters relating to Decisions taken by Management. It can also be concluded that appointing external consultant creates disagreements on the approach of management to handle issues.

Employees prefer to be involved in the process of decision making and with an environment which encourages employee participation. In such a situation, the employees tend to accept the decisions that are arrived at as a privy to the logic and reasoning and logic, reasoning and the context under which the decisions were taken.

To the contrary when external consultants are appointed there is always a feeling of the decisions being thrust on the employees, which creates disagreements.

**Hypothesis 3 : Brainstorming Sessions involving employees leads to Innovative Practices and in turn, benefits the Organization in terms of better efficiency and Effectiveness.**
In the given dynamic environment within which the Organizations operate, it is very important for the Organizations to improve and innovate so as to remain competitive in the Market. Different Strategies are adopted by Managers to achieve excellence in different business processes.

The researcher was of the opinion that in order to innovate in any given Business Process, the managers must have Open Discussions and create think tanks so that any conflicts which may arise can be resolved through discussions and innovative processes/consultations that will be used to manage conflicts.

In order to validate this hypothesis the researcher had identified Q 32 of the questionnaire which sought the opinion of the respondent regarding their agreement to the statement “Brain Storming Sessions are held to resolve issues” and Q 39 of the questionnaire in which respondents were requested to rate to the extent to which they agree to the statement “Debates / Conflicts have resulted in New Innovation”.

As both the variables Q32, herewith indicated as “V1” and Q39, herewith indicated as “V2” were discrete categorized variables, measured on ordinal scale, Spearman’s Rank Correlation Coefficient (Rho) was thought to be most appropriate test.

On the basis of validation and testing of hypothesis, it can be concluded that brain storming sessions in the Organizations will benefit in New Innovations and improve efficiency and effectiveness of the Organization.

Employees are involved in the issues of the organization and brain storming sessions gives an opportunity for employees to own up and come out with solutions that are relevant to their Organizational context. Being the players exposed to the issues, the solutions from them tend to be innovative, efficient and effective.

**Hypothesis 4:** Whenever the Organization follows practices of Open Culture and free vending of Grievances, it leads to Constructive Changes / Improvements and shall benefit in Positive Outcome of Conflict.
The researcher has experienced that Open culture and free vending of grievances by employees creates a very conducive work environment wherein every employee is totally engaged with his work and the organization. Such an environment is stress free as there are no pent up feelings or grievances and could accumulate over a period of time and explode someday.

In an open environment issues are addressed from time to time and there exists a condition of Tranquility & rhythm at the work place. It was a belief of the researcher that conflicts in such positive environment will surely lead to improvements and better alignment of employees within the organization.

In order to validate this hypothesis the researcher had identified Q 9 of the questionnaire which sought the opinion of the respondent regarding their agreement to the statement “Do people feel secure enough (without consequence) to vent their grievances” and Q 40 of the questionnaire in which respondents were requested to rate to the extent to which they agree to the statement “Often Debates/Conflicts have resulted in Constructive Changes / Improvements”.

As the variables Q9, herewith indicated as “V₁” was discrete categorical variable dichotomous variable measured on nominal scale and Q40, herewith indicated as “V₂” was measured on ordinal scale, Chi- Square test was thought to be most appropriate test.

On validation of hypothesis, it can be concluded that where there exists Open Culture and Employees get an opportunity to freely vent their grievances, there is always a scope to have Positive outcome from the grievance / conflict, in terms of Constructive Changes / Improvements that will benefit the Organization, increasing the Effectiveness of the Organization.

Such open culture prevents accumulation of grievances or pent up feelings in employees. Further, grievances tend to get addressed on a regular basis.

Hypothesis 5a: “Age of an employee is associated with presence/existence of Conflict
It was in the interest of the researcher to investigate whether the Age of the respondent has anything to do with the clusters of questions which are based on Indication of Conflict and Positive Outcome of Conflict.

The sum of scores was calculated and defined as new variable “Sum_1” as Indication of Conflict and “Sum_2” as Positive Outcome of Conflict respectively. The median of the Age was found below 40 years. The researcher wanted to examine whether there was a difference in the arithmetic mean of two age groups up to 40 yrs and above 40 years in their scores while mapping with the clusters of questions.

For Statistical Quantitative analysis the questionnaires were coded and checked for uniformity of coding. This was then followed by forming clusters of questions. The clusters were formed by clubbing the questions which had resemblance as mentioned below –

1. **Indication of Conflict for validating hypothesis 5a**
   - Section A - Q4, Q27, Q28, Q29

2. **Positive Outcome of Conflict for validating hypothesis 5b**
   - Section A – Q39, Q40 and Q41.

Levine’s Test (t- test) for Equality of Variances was thought to be the most appropriate test to understand whether there is any difference in mean for age less than 40 yrs and Age greater than 40 years, considering the median of the age, which was found to be 40 years.

It was observed on the basis of t- test output that age of the respondent has no influence on sensing/perception of existence/Indication of Conflicts.

**Hypothesis 5b:** “Age of an employee is associated with Positive Outcome of Conflict, in terms of the ability to manage conflicts more maturely”.

It is generally perceived that young people have the tendency to engage in Conflicts more aggressively and are more prone to have disagreements with others in a head-on manner.
It is seen as a phenomenon, that as a person grows in age, he or she sobers down a bit and there is a change in their approach to conflict situation handling.

Age is usually associated with the attitude of Tolerance, which is state of mind, wherein the “concern for others” starts becoming evident in their behaviors. It was of interest to the researcher to validate the traditional school of thought, that the age of the respondent has a bearing on his ability to manage conflict situations.

Levine’s Test (t-test) for Equality of Variances was thought to be the most appropriate test to understand whether there is any difference in mean for age, less than 40 yrs and Age greater than 40 years - considering the median of the age, which was found to be 40 years.

After validating the hypothesis based on the results of t-test, it can be concluded that age has nothing to do with the Positive Outcome of Conflict. Conflict handling mode or approach seems to be a situational factor wherein the concern of an individual and the conflict environment takes precedent over other variable factor such as age.

**Hypothesis 6:** Lack of Openness and lack of Formal Conflict Resolution process in an organization will result in Managers easily moving away from **Collaborating** conflict handling mode.

In Organizations where the respondents perceive that there is Lack of Openness and Lack of Formal Conflict Resolution Process, 72 % of the Managers who exhibit a Primary Dominant characteristic as “Collaborating”, showed that they moved out of “Collaborating” style to their secondary conflict handling style.

**Hypothesis 6b:** lack of openness and lack of formal conflict resolution process in an organization will result in Managers easily moving away from **Competing** conflict handling mode.

In Organizations where the respondents perceive that there is Lack of Openness and Lack of Formal Conflict Resolution Process, **100 %** of the Managers who exhibit a Primary
Dominant conflict handling style as “Competing”, showed that with least resistance, they move out of “Competing Style” to their Secondary Conflict handling Style.

From the above Hypotheses 6 & 6b it is relevant to know that work environment which are closed and controlled or there is a lack of openness and no formal Conflict Resolution Process.

In such Organizations the Managers choose to take the middle path and avoid and operating in extreme conflict handling modes like “Competing” or “Collaborating” both of which are Quadrants of high concern for self. As they are unsure they prefer to move down to other conflict handling modes with lower concern for self.

**FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

As an outcome of the data analysis and interpretation; following are some of the striking findings of the study –

A. Findings from the Cases

B. Findings from Hypothesis & Data Analysis

A) **Findings from the Cases**

1. Conflict genesis is initially valid at an individual Psychological level, wherein, the conflict is between Individuals, i.e. Employee Vs HR Manager (transactions are at individual level) or between individuals ie. village youth/parents Vs HR Manager. However, when they do not achieve a resolution, and the conflict moves to the next stage, then there is a tendency to involve a larger group, may be, to get a better bargaining power, and the issue takes on the dimension of a Sociological Conflict, wherein the conflict moves to the collective level i.e. Union level or Panchayat level Vs the Company (no longer with HR Manager) and the top Management gets involved. (Case I, II & III)
The experience stressed that this transition in the conflict situation and has applied this aspect in the conflict resolution process, wherein the larger/newer players that have got involved, are also integrated strategically, in the conflict resolution process. This was very evident in “Sons of Soil” issue elaborated in the Case 2.

2. Conflicts with young workers was also related to the Freudian perspective of Parent-Child relationship. As the child grows and reaches adulthood, he/she learns to adapt, accept and deal with the hierarchies and organized authorities at public environment such as Schools, colleges and also Industry. He/she tries to achieve a balance of cooperation and Competition with others and establishes a place within his/her peers along with the prime responsibility of being in employment.

The approach to involve the family as elaborated in Case 1, was an attempt to see if the Freudian evolution has transcended out in the individuals or if the parents could still influence the grown up child, who is a young workman. It was evident that the grown up child (employee) was past the parent-child relationship influences and was driven by his professional role in society/industry, wherein his need to balance Cooperation and Competition with peers was evident, as his parents could not prevail over him during the strike situation.

3. In sociological conflicts involving the local community, as in Case 2, the organization has to first of all appreciate the existence of issues and exhibit Collaborative and Affirmative actions, which will give confidence to the locals, that there is likely to be a win – win situation. Also, the time factor is very relevant in these cases, as any delay could have an adverse sociological impact, wherein the local community could boycott the organizations and in the case 2, the negative impact could have been even on the new recruits who come to stay in the local village.

4. In organizations, where the need for change is basically due to competition from new industries which are using better automation and lean manpower/manufacturing techniques - top management looks at modernization of infrastructure and manpower rationalization.
HR managers are under pressure from the top management to take a firm, assertive stand and work on an approach of High Concern for Task, as in the Thomas – Kilmann model of conflict behavior. This results in a deadlock situation wherein the workers take an adamant stand due to fear and the situation deteriorates, sometimes going out of control. Such situations also encourages individual level conflicts to get into a collective mode just for the purpose of collective strength.

5. HR Managers are often treated as interface with Unions and asked to manage issues with them without following a systematic strategic planning approach. This puts tremendous pressure and stress on the HR Managers, who see it as their personal target to achieve the plans or directives of the management.

Very often HR managers do not have a significant voice over management decisions and are just expected to implement those decisions. In this process, either the HR managers adopt delaying methods – Avoiding style of Conflict management or get into a negotiation mode, thereby, moving into the Compromising style. In view of this, their effectiveness is far from desired in solving the conflicts. It also spills over in conflicts getting attributed to the failure of the individual HR manager in resolving it.

It is seen many times that such Managers leave their jobs and find new jobs. Unfortunately, it is perceived that such a change benefits the organization, as things are viewed by both sides afresh and things move on, just till another major collective issues comes up and again the HR manager gets singled out.

6 For many conflicts in Organisations that have a scale of Sociological impact, such as in the case 3, owing to the fact that the magnitude of change affected the families and the community in which they were living, in such cases, it is prudent to completely understand their real concerns and take the management into confidence about the need to address those issues before actually expecting the real issues to get resolved.

Low hanging fruits, as those peripheral issues can be termed, need to be isolated and worked on and solved in order to create a ground for further positive momentum in the conflict resolution process.
7. It is advisable as evident in case-1, to take the conflict discussions off-site when a situation is sliding toward the destructive path. Few meetings were also organized at the circuit house and found them effective.

8. It was observed that, often managements preferred to close all issues in a closed room and then only go out. This becomes stressful and often leads to a Compromising mode which is not a very desirable conflict handling mode. However, it has helped to have time-outs in order to regain composure. The need to keep Emotions out of the discussions was also experienced in the case.

9. As evident in the cases, the approach to conflict resolution seems to have its effect of stress on HR managers, however, it was found that with sustained perseverance, transparency, involvement in decisions, professional and fair approach, all in all, ensures that the Conflict Resolution Process remains issue based, collaborative and thereby, also creates a ground for mutual trust between the conflicting parties.

2) Findings from Hypothesis & Data Analysis

1. Even if an individual’s primary dominant style is not ‘Collaborative’; integrating positive attributes like open culture, existence of proper conflict resolution process and other such Integrative processes, helps such individuals to move to more desired style and conflict handling mode which have a balance between concern for self and concern for others, with minimal resistance.

2. Integrating factors such as open culture and conflict resolution process will benefit Effectiveness in organization in terms of innovation, lower attrition rate and better satisfaction of employees.

3. Employees are in a positive frame of mind to accept the decisions taken by the management for a conflict situation, when they are involved in the process rather than by appointing an external consultant. Also, appointing an external consultant creates a feeling of decisions being thrust on employees and creates disagreements.
4. Organizations carrying out brainstorming sessions will benefit in new innovations and improve efficiency and effectiveness of the organizations. It gives an opportunity to an individual to get a feeling of being a part of the problem and its solution. An employee can come up with practical solutions, which may benefit him, as well as the organization.

5. The generally perceived thought that ‘Age’ is a predominant factor in conflict handling process, and it correlates positively with positive outcome of conflicts. However, it was observed that the traditional thought, that ‘Age’ has a bearing on his ability to better manage conflict situations is incorrect as seen from the data collected. Age has nothing to do, neither with presence of conflict nor with handling conflict situations effectively.

6. If the employees are not involved in decisions such as new investments, technological upgradation etc., then it results into disagreements/conflicts and also increases the level of dissatisfaction at work.

OTHER FINDINGS

1. Importance and significance of Conflict Management as a Strategy.

1a) In response to the question about the focus of Organisations regarding Training Programs, 69% of respondents responded that Team building Program and 55% responded about Communication skill programs as being the focused and conducted by the organization. Training program on Conflict Management or Conflict handling was not in focus.

1b) 72% of respondents feel that there is no handbook detailing the conflict handling procedure which is made available to each employee.

1c) 52% of respondents said that there are no procedures or guidelines available in their organisation regarding Conflict Handling.

Comments:

Training in most organizations is based on the technical skill and knowledge requirements and the other part is the behavioral training. While the technical trainings are easy to assess, the behavioral training needs to be assessed based on certain
evaluations of the employees behaviours as assessed by his superiors. Thereby, there is an element of subjectivity in the assessment and it leaves the Training manager to work out appropriate interventions or training modules.

The above responses were significant and validates the situation in the Industry. Based on his personal experience also, it only validates that most of the Training plans and calendars are filled with, apart from the Technical trainings, with soft skills training, communication skills, Team working etc., except in very few organizations where Conflict management is included in the Strategic plan.

This is owing to the fact that many organizations at the corporate level, don’t integrate conflict management in their business strategy and thus this important aspects gets marginalized in the day to day strategies. However, the informal and unofficial forums operate in progressive organizations which foster a culture of open communication and expression of disagreements, without any proper internal conflict management strategy.

2. Multinational Companies are appearing to be progressive and participative management philosophy is evident from the following responses. This is a very favorable trend that has been observed which encourages open communication.

2a) 76% of respondent feel that feedback about organization policies/decision are encouraged in organization.

2b) 66% of respondent feel secure enough (without consequence) to vent their grievance.

2c) 71% of respondent feel that Top Management are open to discuss /consider any change in working strategy.

2d) 75% of respondent feel that decision on Major Business issues are based on discussion with all Top Management.

2e) 72% of respondent agree that Top Managers are encouraged to resolve disputes by free discussion.

2f) 71% respondents agree that a person with grievance is given a fair hearing by the Top Management.

2g) 76% of respondent agree that in official meetings, ideas are discussed freely.
2h) 59% of respondent disagree that raising issues is not a hindrances in promotion/performance evaluation.

2i) 64% respondent agree that brain storming session are held in the Organization to resolve issues

2j) 62% agree that in their organization often debates/conflicts have resulted in constructive changes/improvements.

Comments:

It is observed that Progressive Organisations have a very open culture and are encouraging people involvement and supporting open communication. The role of Open communication is vital in organization behavior, as miscommunication typically reduces productivity and increases error and waste. Proper communication done in an appropriate manner keeping the sensitivities of employees in mind, could result in improved morale and team spirit.

This environment is very evident in professionally managed organizations. As it is seen from our sample population, that comprises of MNCs and/or Pvt. Ltd., companies, which, normally tend to be professionally managed. The above responses vindicates the perception of the researcher and also the general perception that such organizations follow practices which are people centric and are sensitive to allow freedom of expression/communication. However, the institutionalization of such processes is very important.

3. Perception of employees towards expressing their disagreements at work :-

3a) 70% respondent disagree that they do not hate disagreement/s at work.

3b) 63% of respondent disagree that showing a true feelings in a dispute is a sign of weakness.

3c) 67% agree that in conflict situation they feel comfortable in expressing their thoughts no matters who, the others are involved.
Comments:

The above responses indicate that there is a growing tendency in professionally managed organizations for their employees to feel comfortable about their freedom of expression, and they exercise it at their workplace. Such an attitude to express and let your colleagues also express their true feelings and disagreements speaks a lot about the organizational culture that is promoting such freedom and at the same time it also indicates that employees are more tolerant and open to discuss disagreements. Others point of view has a significance in such work environment and will foster better team working.

**Open communication** helps organizations improve continuously. Information is not filtered through several levels of management, but instead it is filtered through fewer levels. It is more direct from the upper levels to the lower levels and vice versa.

There is also a link between **Organisational communication & Perception of Justice**. This study reveals and concludes that when employees perceive organizational decisions and activities fair, it leads their trust to increase towards their manager. Concordantly, employees’ perceptions whether it is fair or not participating to decisions, performance evaluation, allocation of organizational resources and rewards like wage and promotions and procedures that play role on operation of these is very important for managers in communication with them. It is clear that process of procedural informing and effective and fair distribution of resources is needed to create a positive employee perception for organization and results of the research is supporting it. Creating positive employee perception like executive policies are fair is only possible with managing organizational communication and information flow effectively and in a healthy way. Managers’ fair decisions and applications generally are not enough for employees’ positive justice perceptions. It definitely should be supported by an effective communication and sharing process. In this context, organization managers have important responsibilities to create a structure that help to spread sharing of organizational information among employees.
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. As evident in the analysis, there is a Dominant conflict handling mode and a Secondary dominant mode. Employees tend to move to favorable mode which will exhibit equal concern for self and concern for others, only when there are integrating factors such as open communication, conflict resolution process etc.. It is recommended that such integrative process is formalized in organizations and employees should be made aware of these. Formal & informal internal communication plays a very important role.

2. Conflict situations do have its share of creating stress in employees, particularly those who need to manage them. Organizations should make sure that the Managers who are managing the conflicts are backed up and regular feedback is taken from those managers to get periodic updates. Accordingly, such internal review mechanism will encourage the managers to take appropriate steps and also plan their actions which will have the full backing of their bosses.

3. In situations where conflicts move from Individual level to collective level and then to a sociological level, the Managers should be able to anticipate such transitions. This needs to be factored in the conflict resolution process planning, wherein the larger/newer players that have got involved, are also integrated in the conflict resolution process and are also addressed. Multi channel communication is vital is addressing and creating awareness of the core issues and suggested options to all the parties involved. This would ensure unity of thought and action from both sides.

4. Many times, it is considered a good strategy to involve the family members during any conflict with individual employees or collective association of employees. However, this seemed to have little or no impact on the employees. It could be a good strategy to create awareness in the community about the status and real issues, just from a good will perspective; however, such actions will not directly impact the conflict resolution process.
5. Brainstorming is a good tool for improving and encouraging employee involvement. This nurtures creativity and innovative approaches to resolve issues. Moreover, employees feel part of the resolution process and hence it creates a conducive environment.

6. External consultants are perceived as outsiders by employees and are seen as management supporters. There is often suspicion and such decisions to involve external consultants should be well integrated and communicated to the employees. Further, teams could be formed with external consultants and internal employees who can be mandated to resolve issues. This will have better acceptance and support from employees. Further, the employees will not feel that solutions have been thrust on them. The solution will be an evolutionary process from within the group.

7. Since age seems to have no correlation with the ability of the person to manage conflicts effectively, it is vital to keep this factor in mind while constituting teams to manage any issue. It may be prudent to have a demographic mix which may be highly effective.

8. During conflict situations that have a sociological impact and magnitude, creating good will with community is important. Further, when there are issues which are complex such as the taxation impact in the case-3 VRS issue, it is necessary from time to time to involve external facilitators such as counselors to address the issues and give an understanding of the proposed solutions and its impact on the employees. This will build trust and confidence and the conflict handling mode will move into the collaborative mode which is the most desirable mode for win-win solutions.

It is important to note that external facilitators are not to be confused with external consultants. Facilitators are counselors who work with the employees in only clarifying the management proposals and do not get involved in the solutions.

9. Since it is important to not isolate the HR manager and make him the sole representative of the company to face the Union, the composition of team is very critical. To be effective, teams should be such that all members bring unique competence to the table. Besides saving resources by not having unnecessary people on the team, such
effective teams foster trust among the team members because they all bring their own skills and are dependent on the other team members at the same time.

For conflicts to stay constructive, it is important that it is seen as a business/work context issue rather than personalizing it, because, whatever the conflicting parties feel toward each other, the focus should stay on the task and not on the people.

10. Collaborative conflict handling mode, although is most desirable, but is a road not often preferred, as it can be long, and requires some skill and effort. Collaboration is about assuming positive intent and seeing things holistically from all sides. It is about acknowledging and accepting differences, and exploring alternative solutions that meet everyone's needs and concerns. It is a useful conflict management strategy when the issues are important to everyone, and all sides need to be committed to the solution.