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A STUDY ON THE MENTAL SETUP OF THE WORKING PEOPLE IN MANAGING CONFLICT THROUGH SOFT SKILLS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO GENDER

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Abstract: The term Conflict is an inseparable one in everybody's life. Conflict is defined as a struggle or contest between people with opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values, or goals. Workplaces are frequently characterized by a variety of destructive conflicts, the intensity of the damage depends on the nature and duration of the conflict. Conflict occurring at a personal level may cause severe damage to the organisation also. Interpersonal skills play a vital role in managing conflict. Conflict on teams is inevitable; however, the results of conflict are not predetermined. Conflict might escalate and lead to nonproductive results, or conflict can be beneficially resolved and lead to quality final products. This paper attempts to explain the concepts of Managing Conflict through Soft Skills among the working people and the differences in dealing Conflict with or without gender bias.

Keyword: Conflict Management, Working people, Gender, Soft Skills, Interpersonal Skill.

INTRODUCTION

Conflict

According to Harigopal K. [1] Conflict is an inevitable part of human existence. Conflict occurs within an individual (intra-individual), between individuals (inter-individual), among and within groups of individuals (inter – and intra-group), and between societies and nations (macro level). Conflict is as old as human existence. Conflicts, at the macro level, have destroyed societies and also have created them. Inappropriately managed conflicts at the organizational and individual levels have resulted in dysfunctional consequences for both, while effectively managed conflicts have contributed to mutual survival, growth and well-being.

Types of Conflict

According to K.A. Jeh [2] Conflicts that support the goals of the group and improve its performance are called functional or constructive forms of conflict. The conflicts that hinder group performance are called dysfunctional or destructive forms of conflict. The difference between functional and dysfunctional conflict is the type of conflict. Specifically there are three types: task – Conflicts over content and goals of the work; relationship-Conflict based on interpersonal relationships and process-Conflict over how work gets done.

The Conflict Process

According to Thomas [3], There are five stages of Conflict Process. They are – Potential opposition or incompatibility; Cognition and personalization; Intentions; Behaviour and Outcomes. The five conflict handling

intentions: Competing, Collaborating, Compromising, Avoiding and Accommodating.

Conflict Management

According to Thomas [3], Conflict can be handled in five different ways. They are Competing-A desire to satisfy one's interests, regardless of the impact on the other party to the conflict; Collaborating-A situation in which the parties to a conflict each desire to satisfy fully the concerns of all parties; Compromising-A situation in which each part to a conflict is willing to give up something; Avoiding-The desire to withdraw from or suppress a conflict and Accommodating-The willingness of one party in a conflict to place the opponent's interest above his or her own.

Soft Skills

According to S.A.W. Bukari [4] Soft Skills can be defined as one which helps an individual to be aware of his strengths, weaknesses, manage the feelings, control the disruptive behavior, sharpen the creative ability, build relationship with others, influence the others and solve the problems related to work.

2. BACKGROUND

Miscommunication in workplace leads to conflict. According to [5] intended message is frequently miscommunicated, misunderstood, mis-quoted or even missed altogether because of ineffective interpersonal communication skills. Through communication people reach some understanding of each other, learn to like each other, influence one another, build trust, and learn more about themselves and how people perceive them. People

who communicate effectively know how to interact with others flexibly, skillfully and responsibly, whereas ineffective communication leads to conflict.

According to Murphy and Eisenberg [6] a sample of schoolchildren, reported that girls seldom use destructive (coercive) strategies with other girls, though they may do so when interacting with boys.

According to Martin and Bergmann [7], an investigation of organizational conflict, found that gender is a moderating variable only when both parties are male (i.e. there is a tendency to attempt to end the conflict with competitive responses).

According to Kluwer, de Dreu and Buunk [8], intimacy is a factor in conflict; in nonintimate relationships, females were found to rate males as less cooperative and more competitive, and males to rate females as more cooperative and less competitive.

3. METHODOLOGY

Conflicts are common in all organisations and occur when people fail to arrive at a consensus regarding the organizational goals or the means to achieve them. Through an extensive literature review, the researcher found some articles that provide answers to the question: What are the major reasons for conflict, level of conflict, dealing the conflict with the opposite gender, conflict within, and the ways to avoid or reduce conflict. A few articles were identified through a computer search of databases of published works and conference proceedings in the information systems area.

The articles were searched by the title based on the following three criteria: it must contain one of the keywords "conflict management", "Soft Skills" and the "Working Place".

The objective of the study is to search for the basic issues of the conflict, how people react towards the conflict among the working people, to know whether is there any difference in dealing conflict with own gender and so the researcher has taken the responses purely from the working people of the various age groups, of various departments of various levels and various years of work experience.

The researcher has taken the questionnaire method to gather the details. The questionnaire is divided into two major divisions, such as demography and the responses related to the mental setup of the working people regarding the conflict. The responses are further divided into personal opinion on conflict and its ways of avoiding or solving it and general opinion on resolving Conflict. All the five factors of Thomas [3] were taken for research with the four point scale. The questionnaire was gathered from two hundred working people through online portal (www.zoho.com) and in person.

The seven important factors of dealing Conflict in different situations

1. Dealing with conflict in the past

Emphasizing the genuine reconciliation would be hard to achieve if the past is not seriously dealt with, and that refusing to confront the past is often justified through an overly-simplistic strategy of "forgive and forget".[9]

2. Dealing conflict with the same gender

A study that was designed to research assumptions that exist regarding the relationship between gender and conflict resolution, as well as compare conflict resolutions strategies of men and women majoring in the area of information systems in order to determine if gender-based differences exist.[10]

3. Dealing conflict with the opposite gender

Differences between males and females in regard to conflict behaviours have also been noted by Gayle et al.[11] According to Laursen & Collins [12] Studies on peer conflict have revealed that females use compromise with friends rather than submission or accommodation; males rely on submission to resolve conflicts with friends.

4. Different reasons for the raise of conflict

According to Ephross & Vassil [13] the closer and safer people feel to one another, the more apt they are to raise annoying issues. According to Assael[14] and Peterson[15], a more intuitively clear effect comes from power imbalance. If structure creates power imbalances, and the weaker party resists the stronger influence, or sees conflict as a way of increasing power then conflict will probably result.

5. The different ways of making a full stop to the conflict through soft skills

According to Borisoff and Victor (Conflict Management: A Communication Skills Approach), the five steps are the essential components of the conflict-management process – problem solving. The "five A's" of conflict management – assessment, acknowledgment, attitude, action and analysis.[16]

6. The person with whom will the discussion be in confidence regarding conflict

Talk to a supervisor you trust about the problem if the situation remains unresolved and looks to continue or worsen [17] Always share the problem with the other person so that we can work it out.[18]

7. Conflict is seen as an opportunity for change

Personalities do not conflict, people's behaviors conflict. Conflict is an opportunity for creative change and development. Though many conflict situations result in destructive behavior, opportunities for growth and positive development are present in each case. [19]

4. RESULT DISCUSSION

The present study is an attempt to know the mental setup of the working people in Managing Conflict through Soft Skills with special reference to Gender. Based on the information gathered from various working people, the following are the findings through multiple responses and four point scale analysis. A few hypotheses were framed for analysis. The dimensionality of Managing Conflicts in the Workplace through Soft Skills – Communication, listening, emotional intelligence and behavioural consequences were examined using factor analysis based on the individual 24 statements.

More than 35% (38%) of the respondents tried to solve conflict with anyone in the past. Surprisingly, less than 10% (9%) only tried to win the conflict.

32% of the respondents tried to avoid conflict with the opposite gender. Only 4% of the respondents tried to accept conflict with the opposite gender.

33% of the respondents tried to solve conflict with the same gender. Only 4% of the respondents tried to accept conflict with the same gender.

44% of the respondents did not accept that there were differences in dealing with conflict with the same and opposite gender.

Out of ten multiple response options, Conflict arises mainly due to Misunderstanding (80 responses), Ego (59 responses) also plays a vital role for conflict. Conflict doesn't arise for fun. Gender difference (8 responses) also doesn't make more impact for the rise of the conflict.

65% of the respondents feel that conflicts could be put at an end by trying to discuss and solve the issue through emotional intelligence.

64% of the respondents agreed that conflict must be seen as an opportunity for change.

61% of the respondents discuss in confidence regarding the conflict with their friends, rather than peer group and superiors.

Comparison in dealing with Conflict regarding opposite and same gender

Sl. No.	Particulars	Opposite gender	Same gender
1	Try to compromise	35	39
2	Try to avoid	65	55
3	Try to win	41	32
4	Try to solve	52	67
5	Try to accept	7	7
	Total	200	200

Table: 1

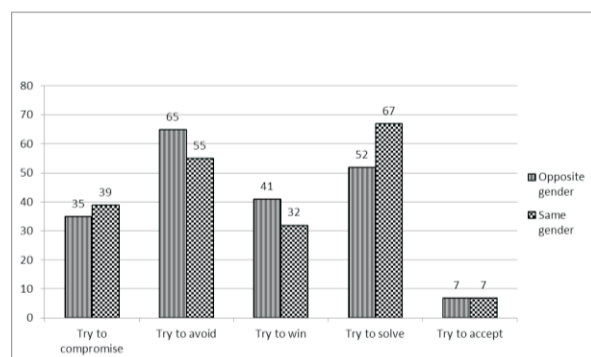


Fig 1

5. CONCLUSION

The various factors for Conflict in the workplace had been identified, based on a review of the Conflict literature. Based on the recent findings and the information from various sources of literature, it is very clear that there Conflict in the workplace is the result of a variety of factors, which are to be taken care of by individuals. Individuals do

not like to win the conflict rather they try to solve the conflict. Though conflict is needed to have a competitive edge over each other, the minimal level of conflict would be advantageous.

This research study has gone in depth to know the ways and means of managing conflict through soft skills with special reference to gender with the help of seven important factors of dealing Conflict in different situations. As a comparison between dealing conflict with the opposite gender and same gender, there is not much difference in the approaches regarding the gender. A few major causes for conflicts are misunderstanding and ego between or among individuals. These issues can be resolved in the four major steps: Communication skills, listening skills, emotional intelligence and behavioural consequences. Individuals discuss on conflict mainly with their friends rather than with the peer groups and superiors.

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