Dealing With Conflict at the Workplace by Adopting Blake and Mouton Strategies

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ABSTRACT

Conflict is an opposing interaction that interferes with the aims of another party (Almost, 2005). Singleton et al. (2011) stated; conflict is functional when the results are positive and people with dissent ideas intend their disagreement to have positive results. Blake and Mouton (1964) classified the five methods in managing interpersonal conflicts which is forcing, withdrawing, smoothing, compromising, and problem solving. In order to minimize the conflicts at workplace, the most suitable conflicts resolution will be the best techniques to face the situation. This has been conducted on a sample of 30 employees from Bank Simpanan Nasional (BSN) and Malayan Banking Berhad (Maybank) in Kuala Lumpur. The data obtained by the survey method with the measurement of 5 point Likert Scale and analyzed by several statistical method that was descriptive, frequency, compute variable and independent-sample test. The problem solving method had been chose by the employees in selecting their way of dealing the conflict.

Keywords: Conflict resolution, forcing, withdrawing, smoothing, compromising, and problem solving

Introduction

Conflict occurs whenever one party presents an opposing interaction that interferes with the aims or goals of another party (Almost, 2005). It may occur between subordinate, management and employee and also inter management. Managers are currently charged with the responsibility of resolving conflict and it is estimated that managers spend around 18 percent of their time in managing employee conflict (McShulskis, 1996). It is been a major responsibility of top management to handle conflict to ensure good environment is been experienced by their employees in the organization. Since conflict is an integral part of any organization, the top management should ensure that conflict is built on healthy dialogue and positive interpersonal skills (Behfar, K. J, Mannix, Peterson, R. S., & Trochim 2011).

Conflict management involves a wide range of activities, including communication, problem solving, dealing with emotions, and understanding positions of the people involved (Behfar et al., 2011). Conflict need to be managed effectively to avoid problems that will lead to stress thus affecting job performance. Imran, Muhammad and Faisal (2011) suggested that most common reasons of conflicts are personal beliefs, miscommunication, sudden change in a policy, differences of opinions and misunderstanding. Starks (2006) stated that conflicts may also arise when the behaviour or actions of people, teams or departments violate the rules, regulations or social norms of an organization.

In addition, the employees find it is hard for them to cope with new environment at their workplace thus it affects the job performance. In order to minimize the conflicts the workplace, the most suitable conflicts resolution will be the best strategies or techniques that can be applied to face this critical situation. The best option chosen by the employees in handling conflicts have the tendency to help them to feel comfortable at their workplace. Blake and Mouton (1964) found the methods used in managing interpersonal conflicts into five types which is forcing, withdrawing, smoothing, compromising, and problem-solving. This model was broadened by Pruitt and Rubin (1986) whereas they come out with Dual Concern Theory. The theory is a function of high or low concern for self-combined that includes five conflict management strategies which are forcing, avoiding, compromising, smoothing and problem solving. Van de Viert (1998) stated that successful conflict resolution not only removes frustration also leads to higher effectiveness, trust and openness.

Literature Review

Conflict management theories are as varied as the definitions of conflict. Some of the earliest conflict management theories were developed by Follett (1940) and Blake and Mouton (1964). Follett (1940) suggested that five conflict management styles: domination, compromise, integration, avoidance, and suppression. Blake and Mouton's (1964, 1970) conflict management approaches were aligned with their Managerial Grid concept which was based on two dimensions, concern for people and concern for production. Conflict management research focus is centred primarily on the conflict situation and the person–situation interaction (Knapp, Putnan & Davis 1988). However, there is a reason to believe that conflict behaviour is determined by both situational and dispositional influences (Sandy, Boardman & Duetsch, 2000). Previous researchers have emphasized the importance of managing conflict in organizational settings (Aritzeta, Senior & Swailes, 2005; Bell & Song, 2005; Brahnam, Margavio, Hignite, Barrier & Chin, 2005). Effective management of conflict is essential for individuals, groups, and organizations to function successfully (Rahim, 2000). If managed effectively, conflict can be a positive force in organizations (Rahim, 2002; Song, Dyer, & Thieme, 2006). Therefore, since conflicts affect organizations on a daily basis, the management of them must be taken seriously for the sake of the organization and its employees (Bordone & Moffitt, 2006).

Forcing, or fighting, contending and seeking to prevail at the expense of the adversary are likely to result in a negative relationship between conflict parties (Van de Vliert, 1998). Forcing is negatively related with concern for the other party, which will usually not improve the relationship (Sorenson, Morse, & Savage, 1999).Withdrawing or avoiding is most often associated with negative substantive outcomes (De Dreu, 1997; Hocker & Wilmot, 1998), as issues are not resolved, and usually become more serious over time, in case of interdependence between the parties. Gross and Guerrero (2000) found that avoiding as a conflict style is seen as situationally and relationally inappropriate, when it comes to achieving personal and dyadic outcomes. In case of temporarily leaving the conflict scene, to cool down or to reconsider ones position, avoiding can contribute to effectiveness (Van de Vliert, 1997).Compromising was found to be relatively high on relational appropriateness, though hardly appropriate (Gross & Guerrero, 2000). This suggests that compromising primarily contributes to relational outcomes, and less to substantive outcomes. It is the characteristics: They are flexible and adaptive, go for splitting the difference, exchanging concessions, or seeking middle ground. Also they seem like overly political or cannot make up their minds.

Smoothing contributes to the interpersonal relationship (Papa & Canary, 1995; Rahim, 2002). Gross and Guerrero (2000) argue that obliging is seen as neither relational nor siluationally appropriate, nor effective, and conclude that this behavioural style is relatively benign. The unique contribution within the conglomerate therefore will be hardly visible the characteristics are associated with these people: they want to be accepted and liked by others, and they think conflict should be avoided in favour of harmony, it is necessary to set aside or compromise goals and they will keep their own ideas to themselves. Confronting (integrating) is synonym with problem solving with high value on relationships and goals. They are likely to confront others and collaborate to accomplish for an objective. They view conflicts as problems to solve and as a way to improve relationships each other; demanding attention to the conflict issue, did not make a significant contribution to conflict outcomes, within the conglomerate (Van de Vliert et al., 1995). As argued above, this may have been caused by the fact that confronting has a positive effect on substantive outcomes, while simultaneously having a negative effect on the relational outcomes.

Research Methodology

This research was conducted at Bank Simpanan Nasional (BSN) in Jalan Ampang,and Malayan Banking Berhad in Pandan Indah. The questionnaires were distributed with a total of 40 questionnaires for each branch. This research uses a non-probability sampling technique which is simple random sampling. There are two sections in the questionnaire that is divided into two sections which are Section A (Demographic) and Section B (Conflict Resolution Strategies). On Section A, the questions outline regarding on the demographic respondent profile such as gender, education background and residence. Section B entails the question consists from number 6 until number 30. This question mixed five independent variables that are forcing, avoiding, compromising, smoothing, problem solving. This questionnaire is using five point Likert scale. The format of a typical five-level Likert item could be strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree. This questionnaire is then distributed and will be analysed by using Statistical Package for Social

Science (SPSS) Version 20 to get the findings. The Cronbach's Alpha that measure the reliability of the questionnaire is 0.902; which is considered as strong and reliable.

Research Findings and Results

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondent (n=30)

Variable	Bank Simpanan Nasional		Maybank	
	n	Percentage (%)	n	Percentage (%)
Gender:				
Male	11	36.7	10	33.3
Female	19	63.3	20	66.7
Residence:				
Urban	20	66.7	24	80.0
Rural	10	33.3	6	20.0
Age:				
Less than 20	1	3.3	0	0.0
21 to 30	10	33.3	11	36.7
31 to 40	12	40.0	10	33.3
More than 41	7	23.3	9	30
Qualification:				
SPM/Certificate	13	43.3	15	50.0
Diploma	9	30.0	10	33.3
Degree	6	20.0	3	10.0
Master	2	6.7	2	6.70
Working Experience:				
Less than 2 years	9	30.0	10	33.3
2 to 5 years	7	23.3	0	0.0
6 to 10 years	9	30.0	1	3.30
More than 10 years	5	16.7	9	63.3

Table 1 indicated the findings on the respondent's demographic. The data shows that total respondent who involved in this research were 30 respondents for both banks. Among 30 respondents, majority of the respondents were female that was 63.3 percent and 66.7 percent from BSN and Maybank respectively. About 66.7 percent and 80 percent of respondents lives in the urban area from both banks. The age of respondents of for BSN is the highest from 31 to 40 years old age group, with 40 percent. Maybank had the highest group of respondents coming from the 21 to 30 years old group that was 36.7 percent. The qualifications have the same majority group, which is form Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM)/ Certificate with 43.3 percent and 50 percent from BSN and Maybank. BSN employees had the highest score of 30 percent that it is form the working experience of less than 2 years and 6 to 10 years. While, Maybank with more than 10 years of working experience for 63.3 percent.

Table 2: Mean for conflict resolution strategies preferred by employees

Variable	Bank Simpanan Nasional		Maybank	
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation
Forcing	3.040	0.534	3.073	0.588
Avoiding	2.813	0.641	2.807	0.727
Compromising	3.527	0.577	3.467	0.719
Smoothing	2.907	0.548	3.013	0.389
Problem-solving	4.000	0.795	3.927	0.961

Table 2 shows the mean value for conflict resolution strategies preferred by employees from both banks. Based on the result, we can see that employees at BSN and Maybank choose problem solving as best strategies in facing conflict. The highest mean is problem solving which are 4.0000 and 3.927 respectively.

Score for problem solving for BSN was are significantly higher than forcing (3.0400), avoiding (2.8133), compromising (3.5267) and smoothing (2.9067). The score of problem solving was also greater for the employees of Maybank that was compared to compromising (3.467), forcing (3.073), smoothing (3.013), and avoiding (2.807).

Conclusion

Based on the study, we can conclude that most of the employees in BSN and Maybank believed problem solving strategies will solve the conflict is the best way in dealing with their conflict at the workplace. The result shows that most of mean score for problem solving are higher than other which was 4.000 and 3.927 mean score for BSN and Maybank. Previous researchers, Blake and Mouton (1964) also describe collaborating or problem solving is the most effective method of dealing with conflict. Employees that choose problem solving as the strategies in handling conflict view conflicts as problems to be solved and as a way to improve relationship each other. Despite, Abdelghafour, Alzawahreh and Khasawneh (2011) found that the dominant conflict style took by employees when dealing conflicts in the workplace is problem solving style.

In addition, conflict may result from difference in personalities, knowledge, education, level of position and natural result of diversity such as gender, age and ethnicity. Due to that, each of organization must know how to control the conflict among their employees. As referring to Sinha (2011), there are various ways or measures, if initiated can play a role in resolving conflict. Sinha suggested that in controlling the conflict, organization must aims for a more inclusive workplace; which is absence of free flow of communication, subordinates feel that their ideas, suggestion, grievances, complaints and views. Since conflict is become the common phenomenon in any organization, top management should ensure their employee know how to deal with the conflict. They should send all employees to this training because each of their employees has their own opinion regarding on conflict issues.

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