

A Study on Effects of Organization Conflict on Team Performance

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Abstract: Organizational conflict is an important topic for both managers and for scientists interested in understanding the nature of organizational behavior and organizational processes [1]. For any organization to be effective there must be an efficient means of conflict in organization. Teams must encounter conflicts as they are working in one command to achieve common goal because conflicts come in many forms in an organization. Conflict within certain limits is essential to productivity. Conflict can be functional to the extent to which it results in the creative solution to problems or the effective attainment of subsystem or organizational objectives that otherwise would not have been possible. Little or no conflict in organizations may lead to stagnation, poor decisions and ineffectiveness. On the other hand, organizational conflict left uncontrolled may have dysfunctional outcomes [2]. Traditionally, conflict was viewed as something harmful but now it has changed to a view that realizes conflict as a reality of organizational life. The purpose of this study was to determine various types of organizational conflicts that influence team performance in organization and to identify the relationship between organizational conflicts and team performance.

Key words: Organizational conflict • Task conflict • Relationship conflict • Process conflict • Team performance

INTRODUCTION

Organizations around the world are doing their best to increase their productivity. To respond to the growing demands for efficiency, organizations are becoming increasingly dependent on teams to develop good services and solve important problems. A team consists of two or more individuals, who have specific roles, perform interdependent tasks, are adaptable and share a common goal [3]. As organizations are becomingly more dynamic and diverse, they are relying on teams to be competitive. Diverse skills and perspectives of individuals within a team can lead to higher performance [4] and teams tend to perform better than individuals on tasks [5-6]. To achieve the potential of performance, an effective cooperation within team is important as it links to goal achievement.

These underlying differences, however, would also expose them to conflict that would likely to affect team performance. Some researchers have argued that conflict is an inevitable and pervasive aspect of organizational life [7-8]. People are said to be in conflict when the actions of one person are interfering, obstructing, or in some other way making another's behavior less effective [9]. Conflict

has been suggested to interfere with team performance and reduce satisfaction because it produces tension, antagonism and distracts team members from performing the task [10].

While conflict is often considered a negative event within a team, some have suggested that the conflict related to the manner in which tasks are completed may actually benefit team outcomes [11]. Organizational conflict may then give negative or positive imposes towards the team performance within organization. Thus, this study was intended to explore the basis for organizational conflict which exist in a Malaysian information technology (IT) company and determine the effects on team performance.

Literature Review: Teams are formed to accomplish tasks that are too large or complex for an individual to complete and are effective for work that requires different types of skills and expertise. Working together as a team means that team members need to have shared understanding of the tasks, the processes involved and their respective roles. Besides, team members need to be able to work well together in order for the team to successfully achieve its purposes [12-13].

Team performance can be defined as the extent to which teams meet established quality, quantity and flexibility objectives [14]. Team members are in conflict as soon as one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party [15].

Conflicts are perceived differences between two or more parties that result in mutual opposition and have both constructive and destructive consequences [16]. Constructive conflict is often characterized by opening up an issue in a confronting manner, developing clarification of an issue, improving problem solving quality, increasing involvement, providing more spontaneity in communication, initiating growth and increasing productivity [17-18]. Destructive conflict is characterized by diverting energy from real task, destroying morale, polarizing individuals and groups, deepening differences, obstructing cooperative action, producing irresponsible behavior, creating suspicion and distrust and decreasing productivity [19-20]. It is essential for organizations to recognize the needed or importance of conflict to maintain competitiveness, further improve effectiveness and efficiency and achieve competitive advantage while enhancing team performance.

There are three types of conflict, namely task conflict, relationship conflict and process conflict in organizational workgroups [21]. These three types of conflict have been found to have different consequences on team performance, with relationship conflict being the most damaging [22]. Task conflict refers to task-related disagreements in which, it has detrimental effects and may encourage the exchange of ideas and improve decision quality [23]. Task conflicts arise when team members disagree about the work to be done, including issues such as team strategy and policy development [24]. Groups who experience task conflict tend to make better decisions because such conflict encourages greater cognitive understanding of the issue being considered [25]. Task conflict enhances creativity, members get alternate ideas for the task at hand, it stimulates discussion and constructive feedback from the group members is likely to flow in, so as a result the group performs better [26].

In addition, it has also been observed in a research that availability of varied perspectives helps the workplace teams to offer better productivity as the knowledge of different employees is assimilated to perform the allocated tasks [27]. Empirical evidence supports the idea that task conflict can be to the advantage of team performance because it motivates team members to analyze task issues and engage in deep and

deliberate processing of task relevant information. However, it should also be considered that a high level of task conflict can create barriers in the effective functioning of the team. To recapitulate, even if task related conflict has advantages, it can shift from one dimension to the other, bringing in the negative influences with that transformation [26].

Relationship conflict describes personalized disagreements that divert attention away from the task and invariably harm team performance [22]. It is about interpersonal incompatibilities among team members, due to differences in personality, personal values and beliefs [28-29]. Based on previous research, relationship conflict limits the information processing ability of the group because group members spend their time and energy focusing on each other rather than on the group's task-related problems and is associated with different negative outcomes such as loss of productivity, breakdown of group unity, poor performance of employees [25]. Furthermore, relationship conflict decreases communication, cooperation and understanding among team members leading to a decrease in team performance [29]. Relationship conflict also have often been found to harm distal group outcomes, such as group creativity [30] and group performance [10].

In addition, process conflict or procedural conflict is as an awareness of disagreement among group members about aspects of how task accomplishment will proceed [29]. In contrary to the relationship and task conflicts, process conflict pertains to issues about the administrative coordination, such as resource delegation, tasks distribution, responsibilities of duty. More specifically, who should do what, whose responsibility it is to complete a specific duty, how often the team should meet, where to meet and so on.

Process conflict can help the group members in identifying the person job fit within the group, taking the various perspectives into consideration [26]. Based on previous research, there are mixed findings on the effect of process conflict on team performance. Process conflict can prompt group members to ask for help, clarify roles, revisit assumptions about the use of resources, set and plan for deadlines and timelines and allocate work more effectively [29]. Meanwhile, some studies have shown a negative influence of process conflict on team outcomes, such as decreased perceptions of creativity and innovativeness [31], as well as increased anger, animosity, negative attitudes toward the group [32].

Based on the above discussed literatures, the objectives of this study were as follow:

- To determine the relationship between task conflict and team performance.
- To determine the relationship between relationship conflict and team performance.
- To determine the relationship between process conflict and team performance.

Hypotheses developed are as follows:

- H₁: There is a relationship between task conflict and team performance
H₂: There is a relationship between relationship conflict and team performance
H₃: There is a relationship between process conflict and team performance

METHODOLOGY

For this study, quantitative method was used in order to identify the relationship of organizational conflict on team performance in a Malaysian information technology (IT) company. The population for this study was 75 employees and 65 employees were chosen as a sample using purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling is confined to specific types of people who can provide the desired information, either because they are the only ones who have it, or confirm some criteria set by the researcher [33]. In this research, researchers used structured questionnaire where all respondents received the same set of questionnaires. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. Part A consisted of questions related to demographic of the respondents and Part B, consisted of questions related to organizational conflict, namely task conflict, relationship conflict, process conflict and team performance.

Jehn's four-item scale was used to assess task conflict [11]. The sample of items for task conflict were, "To what extent are there differences of opinions regarding the task in your work group?" and "How frequently do people in your work group disagree about the work being done?". Respondents were asked to indicate their responses on a five-point Likert scale with (1) not at all to (5) very often.

To measure relationship conflict, researchers used Cammann's four-item scale [34]. The sample of items for

relationship conflict were, "There is constant bickering in my team" and "Some of my team members have no respect for others". Respondents were asked to indicate their responses on a five-point Likert scale with (1) not at all to (5) very often.

Process conflict was measured using Jehn & Mannix's three-item scale [21]. Example of item was "How often are there disagreements about who should do what in your team?". Respondents were asked to indicate their responses on a five-point Likert scale with (1) not at all to (5) very often.

Finally, researchers used an adaptation of Sparrowe's four-item scale to measure team performance [35]. Some of the samples of items include "quality of work," and "getting work done efficiently". Respondents were asked to indicate their responses on a five-point Likert scale with (1) not at all to (5) very often.

Descriptive (frequency analysis) study was undertaken to describe the characteristics of employees (gender, age, job category, division and years of employment). Meanwhile, reliability analysis was used to measure the indication of the stability and consistency with which the instrument measures the concept and helps to assess the goodness of a measure [33]. Furthermore, Pearson correlation coefficient and regression analysis were also used to explore data collected. The software used in this research was Statistical Package for the Social Sciences or SPSS Version 20.0.

RESULTS

As demonstrated in Table 1, 65 respondents of a Malaysian information technology (IT) company were consisted of 56.9 % females and 43.1% males. Majority of the respondents were between 21 - 30 years of age (56.9%), in technical executive category (53.8%) and most of them worked in technical division (35.4%). Majority of them also had the working experience of 5 years and above (56.9%).

Table 2 indicated the Cronbach's Alpha values for all the variables used in the questionnaire as well as descriptive analysis of the variables. Based on the table, all variables used in the questionnaire were greater than 0.60 ($\alpha > 0.60$), indicating that the questionnaire was acceptable whereby it had fulfilled the minimum internal consistency [33].

Table 1: Demographic Profile

Profile	Category	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	43.1
	Female	56.9
Age	21 - 30 years	56.9
	31 – 40 years	30.8
	Above 40 years	12.3
Job category	Technical executive	53.8
	Executive	33.8
	Non executive	12.3
Divison	HR and Finance	6.2
	Sales and Marketing	23.1
	Operations	35.4
	Project Management	18.5
	Others	16.9
Working experience	Less than 1 year	9.2
	1 - 3 years	18.5
	3 - 5 years	15.4
	5 years and above	56.9

Table 2: Descriptive and reliability analysis for all variable.

Variables	Mean	Std Dev	Cronbach's Alpha
Task conflict	3.3938	.52793	.604
Relationship conflict	3.1385	.68092	.792
Process conflict	3.6523	.54231	.633
Team performance	3.7615	.62982	.871

Table 3: Pearson Correlation analysis for all variables

	TC	RC	PC	Team performance
Task conflict	1			
Relationship conflict	.096	1		
Process conflict	.158	-.030	1	
Team performance	.187	-.223	.613**	1

Note. **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

As depicted in Table 3, there was no relationship between task conflict and team performance ($r=0.187$, $p = 0.137$), no relationship between relationship conflict and team performance ($r=-0.223$, $p = 0.074$) as well as a moderate and positive relationships between process conflict and team performance ($r=0.613$, $p = 0.000$) [36]. Therefore, H_3 was accepted, meanwhile H_1 and H_2 were rejected

DISCUSSIONS

There was no relationship between task conflict and team performance. From previous research, task conflict and team performance appear to be only weakly related [37]. In addition, it was indicated that the impact of task conflict on team performance can be inconsistent and circumstantial [10].

In the present research, it was revealed that there was no relationship between relationship conflict and team performance. Relationship conflict decreases team member satisfaction and thus, impedes task performance [25]. The damaging effect of relationship conflict in a team can trickle upward and negatively influence team performance [38].

Moreover, there was a moderate and positive relationship between process conflict and team performance. Previous research found that there was a moderate positive relationship between process conflict and team effectiveness [39] in which this was potentially to be related to team performance. Process conflict can prompt group members to ask for help, clarify roles, revisit assumptions about the use of resources, set and plan for deadlines and timelines and allocate work more effectively [29]. Besides, it was found that there were higher levels of process conflict in high performing groups compared to low performing groups in the middle stage of a project [23].

CONCLUSION

Conflict is not necessarily unfavourable when properly managed because of several advantages that have been identified such as increasing personal growth and morale, enhancing communication and producing better project outcomes. Conflict can bring about underlying issues such as conflict can force people to confront possible defects in a solution and choose a better one.

The elements of interdependence, emotions, perceptions and behaviours must be included in order to understand conflict further such as conflict occurs between parties whose tasks are interdependent, who are angry with each other, who perceive the other party as being at fault and whose actions cause a business problem. Conflict can be constructive and healthy for an organization. It can aid in developing individuals and improving the organization by building on the individual assets of its members.

However, conflict can be the decline of an organization if it is not effectively managed. Organizations need to be aware of the different types of organizational conflict and the effects on team performance. The way a team deals with conflict can influence whether and how these conflicts are resolved and, as a result, the team's subsequent performance. Thus, it is hoped that this research can provide some directions for managers to improve team performance through conflict management.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research was funded by Universiti Teknologi MARA, file no 600-IRMI/MYRA 5/3/LESTARI (0124/2016).

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