



EFFECTIVITY OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN ACADEMIC ORGANIZATIONS

Management

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ABSTRACT

Academic organizations are the hubs of creativity with intellectual ideas and the transactions based on knowledge currency. Increasing rate of conflicts and decreasing rate of attentive communication towards resolve is the major concern hampering the overall success rate. Encouragement of academic freedom and unbridled thinking can lead to various unavoidable areas and various levels of conflicts among major stakeholders of academic organizations, viz. students versus faculty, faculty versus faculty, faculty versus administrators and students versus students. The potential sources of conflict may range from miscommunication, misinformation, undue expressions, reactions and responses, real or perceived differences in needs, priorities, values, beliefs, attitudes, cultural diversity as well as structural conditions. The pinpoint root cause for the conflicts is lack of communication skills and the ignorance towards the requirement of its education in academics. Communication skills are utmost important in resolving the conflicts and arresting the upsurge of conflicts in an academic setup. The notion of conflict resolution is to expose and resolve conflict before it damages relationships or degenerates into virulent violence among people. For an optimum success and non-recurrence of conflict, a resolution must understand conflict content, similarity of conflicts occurring in multiple similar organizations, assess conflict reasons, meet demands of all involved parties by constructing a common platform for discussing and closing on positive note. Conflict resolution involves deployment of conflict management skills addressed by interpersonal communication skills to foster organizational and social harmony. The objective of this review article is to elucidate the interrelation of interpersonal communication skills with various shades and areas of conflict, examine its connection with the reasons and resolution of conflicts, to appraise the needs of conflict resolution at various levels in academic organizations and conclude on the management of successful resolve by effective interpersonal communication skills.

KEYWORDS

Academic Organizations, Effectivity, Interpersonal Communication Skills, Conflict Resolution

INTRODUCTION:

Conflict is a felt struggle between two or more interdependent individuals over perceived incompatible differences in beliefs, values and goals, or over differences in desires for esteem, control and connectedness (Hocker and Wilmount, 2011). Universities and higher educational institutes are the only supplier of a qualified and skilled pool of human resources throughout the world. The academic organizations thrive to provide the highly talented and skilled human resources for the national development as well as to meet the demand of the professional human resources of the country. In this process, many academic organizations are facing a new challenge of the conflicts arising out of various academic transactions. Conflict is unavoidable in the institutions of higher education due to encouragement of academic freedom and unbridled thinking (Siraj et.al., 2011). Gmelch and Carroll (1991) had opined that conflict "is sewn into the fabrics" of educational institutions as a result of the nature of the functional and relational characteristics of the various academic departments. Miklas and Kleiner (2003) had further explained that the educational institutions are "a perfect breeding ground for conflict" as a result of the academic freedom present there, whereby the academic staff is more independent in their approaches and viewpoints.

Major stakeholders in academic organization where conflict can arise are students versus faculty, faculty versus faculty, faculty versus administrators and students versus students (Holton, 1995). Conflict occurs both in men and women, however the perception and the handling of the conflict is different for men and women. Both the genders interact differently in the same sex groups. Women have an equalitarian ideology and are not competitive, they desire cooperative, empathetic supportive calm leaders unlike men who prefer demanding, aggressive, rational and decision oriented leaders (Shimanoff and Jenkins, 2003).

The major reason for the conflicts is lack of communication skills and ignorance towards its importance in academic organizations. Conflicts basically arise due to disagreement of the individuals with each other

during work cycle in the business environment. Conflict, ranging from curriculum disputes, inter-state disagreements, civil crises and human rights, to military warfare, differs from one context to another. Failure to effectively manage conflicts amongst various stakeholders in an academic institution not only increases the duration of stay of the students in the institute but also increases the financial burden on the parents. Moreover, it also maligns the image of the institute. Conflict can weaken loyalty of the stakeholders to their institutions, prevent the achievement of goals and slowly destroy institutions (Abdulghani and Guoyuan, 2017).

The frequency of outside and inside conflict continues to affect all sectors, and education. Internal and external conflicts keep on targeting the populated areas, especially educational sector (Gomez, 2016).

The notion of conflict resolution is based on the idea that it is better to expose and resolve conflict before it damages relationships or degenerates into virulent violence among people.

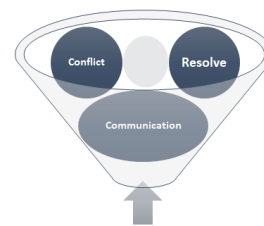


Figure 1: Effectivity of Communication Skills

Communication skills and the flow of the communication, which is a part and parcel of the academic business environment, play a vital role in conflict resolution. A healthy academic workplace cannot be defined without proper communication skills. Effective communication means that all participants in the communication comprehend and understand the content of communication. The academic business involves two types of communication process, an external

communication to the outside stakeholders of an organization and an internal communication directed to all students and employees of the organization. Conflicts are the integral part of business communication as there are multiple opinion of all stakeholders based on the individual behavior and training. Business can be affected by having too many conflicts at a time or not having any conflict during its function at any point of time. Conflict and communication are closely associated to each other. Appropriate communication is the master key to turn around the situations of conflict into situations of harmonious approach. There is a need of structured mechanism for conflict resolution in academic organizations by way of effective communication among various stakeholders. There is no doubt that higher education has long-standing conflicts throughout the world. All stakeholders of an academic organization should frequently meet at a common platform to discuss various issues that lead to conflicts. Hence, a review of the causes and circumstances of conflicts and its resolution with effective communication skills in academic environment is undertaken in this article.

ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICTS IN ACADEMICS-

Conflict happens in groups for many reasons. The sources of conflict may range from miscommunication and misinformation, real or perceived differences in needs, priorities, values, beliefs, attitudes and culture as well as structural conditions (Kelsey D and Plumb, 2004). The conflicts in the academic organization vary from campus to campus and reflect university size, location, student population, mission, specialization and governance. However, conflicts in academic organization also share enough in common to be universally understood. Most common disputes may arise from the wide range of topics such as norms about faculty-student, sexual harassment policies, examination policies, academic rules or student behavior codes etc. Yet when conflicts occur over these and other campus related matters, there are many similarities in the dispute culture across universities. The management of conflicts on college campuses is as complex and as varied as the nature of conflicts themselves (Volpe and David, 1999).

Over past few years, conflicts in academic organizations are increasing in number, kind, and complexity. The current university context is more challenging than in the past. Because of the growth and range of conflicts the forums available for their management are much more far-reaching than ever before. There are countless pushes and pulls from internal and external sources which influence the kind and quantity of conflicts that emerge. More legal challenges are being brought against faculty and universities today due to new or different perspectives about what constitutes a conflict. It is because of the increasing right based ethical considerations that did not previously exist. The rights of students and employees are expanding as are the specific responsibilities of the academic organizations. As per Bankovskaya, 2012 the easiest way of understanding conflict is to divide it into theories of conflict which are functional, situational and interactive. The followers of functional approach think that a conflict serves a social function and those who view a conflict as situational, suggest that conflict as an expression under certain situations. The third theory views conflict as interactive. Functionalists usually ask the question: "Why is there conflict? What purpose does it serve?" while situationalists ask: "When do we have conflict? Under what circumstances does it occur?" Interactionists' questions are: "How is there conflict? What methods and mechanisms are used to express it? Academic policies of the institutes are always bringing in many conflicts and these policies in many organizations continue to be main reasons for disputes. It happens so because of wrong placement of the academic head in the private academic institutions. It follows the administrative authorities that always try to resolve the conflicts through dominance. This creates more conflicts rather than solving it. Another area of concern for the academic organization is the workplace sexual harassment. Earlier, if there was any unwelcome sexual intention, it was limited to an individual issue. Today, academic organizations should pay a close attention towards sexual harassment to respond to the laws and the good social figure and reputation. Other communication based barriers in the academic organizations may be the result of differences in speaking styles, writing styles and non-verbal communication styles. Misperception and misunderstanding among people can lead to bad communication which can force a long-standing conflict to arise. Some of the other reasons for the conflict can be cross gender and cross cultural differences. The basic differences in this case is the way people are expressing themselves and the way they

are likely to interpret the communication with others (David, 2012).

Looking at the entire scenario of the academic transactions, the rapid knowledge gaining process involving multiple stakeholders in higher education may also lead to the disputes. Higher education always involves a process of establishing superiority among the academicians and researchers by the process of proving the knowledge. The term can be referred to academic or knowledge supremacy. During this cycle, disputes usually arise because of the misinterpretation of the concepts and policies.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN ACADEMIC ORGANIZATION-

If the conflicts in academic institutions are not properly managed and not effectively resolved, it will adversely affect the productivity of the stakeholders of the organization initially and in the long run its goal. The first step towards resolution of any conflict is to know its cause. According to Mayer (2000), if the causes of conflict are known, a conflict chart which directs management processes can be developed. This can enable organization's managers to develop appropriate strategies towards managing such a conflict.

The process of defusing antagonism and reaching agreement between conflicting parties is what is generally referred to as conflict resolution. Eliminating the conflicts with human vicinities is an unrealistic thinking, realizing that conflicts have both positive and negative dimensions. Conflict management is a better solution than conflict elimination. Hence, university authorities and all educational stakeholders must find some ways to manage the conflict and prevent them from turning into disaster (Adesiyani et.al., 2015). Conflict Management involves designing effective macro-level strategies to minimize conflict dysfunctions and enhance constructive functions in order to enhance learning and effectiveness in an organization and not reducing or terminating conflicts (Rahim, 2002). Whereas Conflict Resolution implies a reduction, elimination or termination of conflict; it involves mediation, negotiation, bargaining and arbitration which fall into the conflict resolution category (Robbins, 1978)

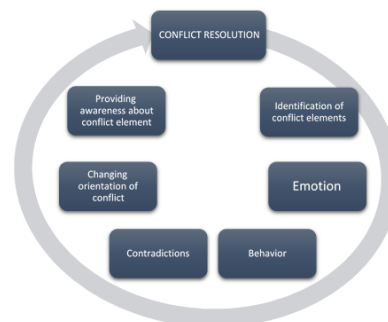


Figure 2: Components involved in the conflict resolution

In an academic organization conflict resolution basically involves the identification of conflict elements, emotions, behavior and contradictions followed by changing the orientation of the conflict and making the different parties aware of the elements.

Change in those elements allows transformation of the conflict direction, which leads to the solution apparent (Bernard and Ashimi, 2014). Conflict resolution involves deployment of conflict management skills to foster social harmony. The notion of conflict resolution is based on the idea that it is better to expose and resolve conflict before it damages people's relationships or even before it degenerates into virulent violence. There is a demand of moral authority and leadership integrity to resolve social conflicts in educational institutions. If not resolved they can have a destabilizing effect on institutional performance in training and research processes. The importance of conflict management relates to the central need of engendering sustainability of these specialized processes in the academy entrusted with providing higher learning to humanity. According to the principle of conflict resolution, the only true solution to conflict is one that attempts to satisfy the inherent needs of all parties involved. The room for negotiation can therefore be always provided by the intellectual leadership culture. In negotiation, the parties hold conversations to settle their disputes. There must be dialogue, what Habermas calls purposive or communicative dialogue. It has been observed that, some administrators find domination as a tool to resolve

conflicts. Domination is one of the most destructive elements of social action. It institutes a special case of oppressive power (Weber, 2012).

From the conflict resolution point of view, conflicts can be resolved by considering the needs of the people involved and affected in the conflicts. Conflict resolution must meet demands of all parties involved in the conflict. Conflict resolutions in which one party's needs are met at the expenses of the needs of the other party are likely to last for a shorter period (Kazan MK and Ergin, 1999). One of the very basic principles of the conflict resolution is to understand and respect diversity in views and perspectives (Bernard and Ashimi, 2014). To establish structured mechanism for conflict resolution in the academic organizations, the apex bodies of all sectors of higher education should come out with the workable uniform policies. The response of the academic body like UGC will always help to resolve many conflicting situations even before they are aroused.

Role Of Communications In Managing Conflicts In An Organization -

As per Fatile and Adejuwon (2011), dysfunctional conflict in higher institutions is on the increase because the parties involved, among other things, do not explore the use of effective communication. In an empirical research carried out by Adeyemi and Ademilua (2012), it was observed that the foremost cause of conflict was lack of communication between the management of universities and the employees as out of 3,112 respondents, 3,006 representing 96.6% claimed that communication gap was the greatest cause of conflicts within the system. Chukwuemeka *et al.* (2012) also identified poor communication as one of the sources of conflict within an organization because the lack of effective communication in handling issues that lead to employees' grievances make them feel unhappy and this can lead to uncertainty, misinformation and conflict within the organization. Therefore, in order to understand conflict, there is the need to understand communication. Conflict and communication are closely related to each other. According to Hocker and Wilmot, 1985 communication is the central element in all interpersonal conflict.

The relation between researchers, communication and conflict is in three ways (Fleetwood, 1987)-

1. Communication behavior often creates conflict. 2. Communication behavior reflects conflict. 3. Communication is the vehicle for the productive or destructive management of conflict.

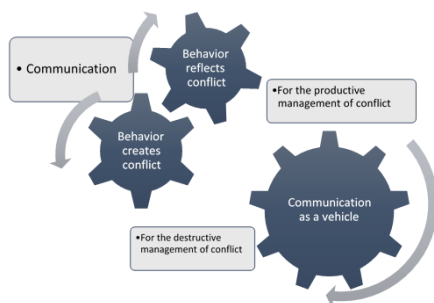


Figure 3: The relation between researchers, communication and conflict

Effective speaking and listening skills are always important benchmark in conflict resolution. Markman *et al.*, 2010 stated that, what they call the "speaker-listener" technique to help individuals more effectively communicate. In this process each partner takes turns being the speaker and the listener. Markman *et al.*, 2004 have given the rules for effective speaking as a tool of communication for conflict resolution. There is always disagreement between the points of views of two individuals, but understanding and validating other thoughts and feelings can improve relationships and help to build on common grounds which leads to more effective negotiations and problem solutions (Gottman JM and Silver, 1999). Effective communication always tries to convince the content to all the parties involved. With effective communication, there are less chances of conflict. According to Sharon, effective communication means that all participants in the communication comprehend and understand the content of communication (Sharon, 2003). Language also has got a huge role to play in the effective communication. The misapplication of the language in the communication brings in the disharmony and confrontation, however on the other side when the language is used democratically; it always brings about cooperation (Orjime, 2002).

Choice of words matter a lot in the communication, wrong words passes wrong message hence it can be misinterpreted and lead to the conflict. Communication is an important management skill, therefore the administrators should become more aware of the way their communication is perceived by evaluating and monitoring their communication behavior, which would allow them to adjust their messages in order to minimize conflict (Rosenblatt and Davis, 2009). It is established from the literature review that, situations, areas and topics of conflicts in the academic organizations are unavoidable.

CONCLUSION:

The diverse nature of academic transactions with multiple stakeholders is quite likely to generate disputes at any point of transactions. The most common reasons are misunderstanding, misinterpretation, and unhealthy competition, rapid process of gaining the knowledge and establishing academic or knowledge supremacy. Conflict and communication are closely associated to each other. Appropriate communication is the master key to turn around the situations of conflict into situations of harmonious approach. Short comings of communication skills pervading language, behavior, expressions, and responses should be identified and persistent institutional efforts and actions should be incorporated to rectify those short falls. Strategies to teach and enhance communication skills, interpersonal communications should be implemented within academic organizations.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

There is a need of structured mechanism for conflict resolution in academic organizations by way of effective communication among various stake holders, to minimize conflict. For this, the apex bodies must carefully design the policies and these policies should be implemented uniformly throughout all higher educational institutes. The common topics of conflicts should be examined and get enlisted for administering common solutions. A cohesive approach for the generic and specific strategies for thorough root elimination of conflict causes should be formulated. Specific ethical protocols among all the organizations should be standardized to bring in the healthy competitive spirit among the stake holders from various organizations. Academic organizations should build a strong foundation of communication skills, enhance interpersonal relationships to bring common conflicts to a common platform for discussion, actions and optimum resolve of the common issues that result in to conflicts on a frequent basis.

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