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**Conflict Managment**

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# CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

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## **Abstract**

This working paper examines the nature of conflict and the ways in which it develops. It discusses different responses to conflict as well as methods for managing and resolving disputes more effectively. Conflict is defined as disagreements, tension, or difficulties that arise between two or more parties, including individuals or groups. Such conflicts occur when people perceive that their goals, interests, or needs are being obstructed. Conflict may be public or private, formal or informal, and may be addressed either rationally or irrationally. Conflict is a central issue in many aspects of organizational behaviour. For instance, role-related conflicts can create stress, while power struggles and organizational politics may both cause and result from conflict. Differences in work responsibilities, interpersonal relationships, and group interactions can also generate conflict, whether between individuals, within groups, or among different groups.

Although a certain degree of conflict is considered beneficial and even necessary in organizations, excessive conflict can increase stress and lead to negative outcomes. Employees and groups may divide over matters such as budget distribution, organizational priorities, or perceptions of fairness. Conflicts between labour unions and management often centre on wages and working conditions. Some disagreements are relatively minor and resolved quickly, while others remain unresolved and escalate into serious disputes or organizational crises. Nevertheless, conflict does not always produce harmful effects. Its impact largely depends on how it is perceived and how effectively it is managed.

## **1. Introduction: conflict as a process**

Conflict should not be viewed as a fixed or isolated event. Rather, it is a dynamic process that evolves through a sequence of stages. Conflict progresses through several interconnected phases, including antecedent conditions, perceived conflict, manifest conflict, conflict resolution or suppression, and the aftermath (Pondy, 1967; Thomas, 1990; De Dreu & Gelfand, 2012; Shah et al., 2021).

The first stage - antecedent conditions - refers to the circumstances or factors that create the foundation for a conflict situation. At this stage, conflict may exist beneath the surface without being openly expressed because neither party actively pursues or confronts the issue. In some cases, a direct action may trigger the conflict process. For example, an employee may intentionally withhold resources or equipment required by others to perform their tasks, or a department may receive resources that another department believes are unfairly distributed. Antecedent conditions can also emerge in less obvious ways. For instance, organizational pressures placed on a production department to reduce costs may conflict with the objectives of a marketing department seeking to satisfy urgent customer demands. Such incompatible expectations and competing interests often create the basis for future disagreements (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2012; Jehn & Bendersky, 2015).

The second stage - perceived conflict - occurs when individuals or groups recognize the existence of a threat or problem. Awareness is essential because conflict cannot progress unless the involved parties identify and interpret a situation as problematic. Actions that disadvantage others may not result in conflict if they remain unnoticed. Conversely, individuals may perceive threats even when no intentional action has occurred. Whether the conflict is real or imagined, such perceptions often produce emotional reactions, including frustration, fear, anger, or anxiety. At this point, individuals may begin questioning the reliability of others and their own ability to manage the situation. This

stage is particularly significant because parties start identifying the central issues and exploring possible solutions.

As perceptions intensify, conflict may move into the manifest conflict stage, where individuals respond behaviourally to the situation. Manifest conflict represents the visible expression of disagreement through actions or interactions. Examples include arguments, complaints, defensive reactions, aggressive behaviour, formal grievances, or attempts at collaborative problem-solving. In organizational settings, employees may openly challenge decisions or take measures to protect their own interests when they perceive a threat (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2012).

The next stage involves conflict resolution or suppression. Conflict may be resolved through mutual agreement, negotiation, or the implementation of solutions designed to address the underlying issues and reduce the possibility of future disputes. Resolution can also occur when one party achieves its objectives while the other yields or accepts the outcome. However, in some situations, conflict is not truly resolved but rather suppressed. Suppression takes place when parties avoid direct confrontation, ignore disagreements, or refrain from expressing their concerns openly. While this approach may temporarily reduce visible tension, it often fails to eliminate the underlying causes of conflict (Jehn & Bendersky, 2015).

The final stage is the aftermath of conflict, which refers to the outcomes and long-term effects that remain once the conflict episode has ended. The consequences of conflict may be positive or negative depending on how the situation was handled. Effective resolution can improve relationships, increase understanding, and establish clearer procedures or communication patterns between parties. For example, a disagreement between employees and management may lead to new policies that prevent similar problems from occurring in the future (De Wit et al., 2012; Jehn & Bendersky, 2015).

On the other hand, unresolved issues or poorly managed conflicts may damage relationships and create feelings of dissatisfaction, resentment, or mistrust. Such negative outcomes can reduce communication and create conditions for future disputes. Consequently, the long-term impact of conflict depends largely on whether the resolution process strengthens cooperation among the involved parties or deepens divisions and encourages further conflict.

## **2. Perspectives on Conflict**

Conflict can be understood from several perspectives, each offering a different interpretation of its causes, significance, and impact within organizations. Three commonly recognized viewpoints consider conflict as preventable, inevitable, or beneficial to organizational functioning.

The first perspective views conflict as preventable, suggesting that disagreements and tensions can be avoided through appropriate management practices and effective organizational planning. This approach assumes that conflict emerges primarily from misunderstandings, poor communication, or ineffective relationships among employees. According to this view, managers can minimize conflict by promoting positive working environments, establishing clear policies and procedures, and encouraging cooperation toward shared organizational objectives. This perspective recognizes that some organizational conflicts may indicate underlying issues that can be corrected through improved management practices and organizational adjustments.

The second perspective considers conflict as inevitable, arguing that it is a natural and unavoidable aspect of organizational life. Organizations consist of individuals and groups with different responsibilities, values, goals, and interests, making complete harmony difficult to achieve. For example, objectives related to cost reduction may conflict with goals that emphasize creativity and innovation. Similarly, organizational structures often separate employees into specialized departments, each developing distinct viewpoints and priorities. Such differences frequently create situations where one group's activities unintentionally interfere with another's objectives. In addition, organizational plans and policies cannot anticipate every circumstance, which increases the likelihood of disagreements. From this perspective, attempts to eliminate all forms of conflict may be unrealistic and potentially counterproductive. Instead, organizations should focus on anticipating areas where disagreements are likely to occur and developing strategies to manage them effectively.

The third perspective proposes that a certain degree of conflict is healthy and beneficial for organizational performance (Cosier & Dalton, 1990). This viewpoint suggests that

conflict can stimulate critical thinking, encourage innovation, and improve decision-making processes. For instance, if departments such as marketing, research, and production never experience differences in opinion, this may indicate a lack of engagement or limited responsiveness to changing organizational needs and market opportunities. Constructive disagreement among departments may encourage the development of new ideas and promote continuous improvement.

Research has also demonstrated that moderate levels of conflict can contribute positively to group performance, particularly in situations involving complex or non-routine tasks (Jehn, 1995). Constructive conflict may encourage individuals to challenge assumptions, evaluate alternatives, and develop creative solutions. Conversely, excessive efforts to avoid conflict entirely can contribute to dysfunctional group behaviours such as groupthink, where individuals prioritize agreement and consensus over critical evaluation. While consensus can facilitate decision-making, it may also limit creativity and reduce the quality of outcomes.

The relationship between conflict and organizational effectiveness suggests that there is an optimal level of conflict. Insufficient conflict can negatively affect organizational performance because individuals may avoid interaction and fail to generate new ideas or innovative solutions. A lack of challenge and discussion may reduce creativity and organizational growth.

Conversely, excessive conflict can also create significant problems. Persistent disagreements, poor communication, and an inability to recognize the concerns of others may disrupt cooperation and hinder progress. Under such conditions, organizational members may become more focused on defending personal interests or engaging in internal disputes rather than working toward collective goals. As a result, important issues may remain unresolved and organizational effectiveness may decline.

At an optimal level, conflict contributes positively to organizational performance. Employees become more engaged and motivated, diverse perspectives are encouraged, and efforts are directed toward improving processes, quality, and competitiveness. In such situations, tensions and disagreements are managed constructively and transformed into productive actions rather than destructive behaviours. Therefore, effective organizations do not seek to eliminate conflict entirely but instead strive to maintain and

manage it at levels that support growth, innovation, and performance (De Wit et al., 2012; Jehn & Bendersky, 2015).

### **3. What Triggers Conflict**

To manage conflict effectively, it is necessary to understand the factors that contribute to its development. Conflict does not arise randomly; rather, it results from a combination of influences associated with organizational structures, environmental conditions, and personal characteristics. The major sources of conflict can generally be classified into three categories: organizational conditions, situational conditions, and individual characteristics.

*Organizational conditions* frequently create circumstances that encourage conflict because organizations bring together individuals and groups with different responsibilities, objectives, and priorities. Structural arrangements, systems, and organizational practices may contribute to disagreements among employees and departments. Organizations commonly divide work among departments and specialized units, each with distinct functions and priorities. For example, production departments may focus on efficiency and cost reduction, whereas marketing departments prioritize customer needs and market opportunities. Research departments may concentrate on innovation and scientific advancement. Such differences often create divisions among departments and may become a source of conflict. Although these differing priorities can create tension, they are often necessary for organizations to achieve their broader objectives. The distinction between line and staff departments can also become a source of disagreement. Line departments are directly involved in achieving the organization's primary mission, while staff departments provide support and assistance to operational units. Staff departments frequently develop policies, evaluate performance, or implement procedures that line departments may not fully understand or accept. Differences in experience, perspectives, and organizational roles may therefore contribute to conflict.

Goals provide direction and motivation; however, they do not always prevent conflict. Even when organizational members pursue similar objectives, disagreements may emerge concerning the methods used to achieve them. Conflicts can also arise within departments

when objectives compete with one another. For example, productivity goals may conflict with safety and maintenance objectives.

Resources such as finances, equipment, personnel, and time are generally limited within organizations. Because available resources are often insufficient to satisfy all demands, competition among individuals and groups may develop. This competition frequently becomes a source of tension and disagreement. Organizations often seek to establish clear reporting relationships through the principle of unity of command, where employees report to one supervisor. However, employees are frequently influenced by several individuals, including managers, co-workers, and senior leaders. Multiple and competing demands can create confusion and conflicting expectations, increasing the likelihood of conflict. Policies and procedures are intended to reduce uncertainty and clarify responsibilities. However, excessive regulations and controls may lead employees to feel constrained or overly restricted, reducing perceptions of trust and autonomy. Similarly, reward systems can become sources of conflict when employees perceive them as inconsistent or unfair. Tension may arise when workers experience conflicting expectations regarding performance and rewards.

*Situational conditions* are another source of conflict, that may also result from environmental circumstances and workplace conditions that shape interactions among individuals and groups. Conflict becomes more likely when individuals work closely together and interact frequently. Complex projects and highly interdependent tasks increase opportunities for misunderstandings and disagreements. Nevertheless, interaction itself does not necessarily lead to conflict. Research suggests that productive groups often engage in frequent communication, collaboration, and information sharing (Ancona, 1990). Furthermore, organizations with low levels of conflict tend to demonstrate stronger and more productive connections between groups (Nelson, 1989). Situations requiring agreement among multiple individuals or departments may generate conflict. When decisions involve shared resources or collective interests, disagreements may arise regarding quality, cost, priorities, or implementation methods.

Differences in perceived status or authority can create tension between individuals and groups. Research conducted within the restaurant industry demonstrated that perceptions of status differences influenced interactions among employees, leading to behaviours that

contributed to conflict (Whyte, 1949). Communication can function as both a source of conflict and a means of resolving it. Ineffective communication often creates misunderstandings and confusion, while increased communication may reveal disagreements or perceptions of unfairness. Therefore, communication may either reduce or intensify conflict depending on how information is exchanged. Unclear roles and responsibilities frequently contribute to conflict. Ambiguity regarding authority and job responsibilities may cause individuals and departments to compete for influence or disagree about task ownership, leading to tension and reduced effectiveness.

*Individual differences* significantly influence the likelihood of conflict because personal characteristics shape the ways individuals perceive situations and interact with others.

Conflict often arises because individuals interpret situations differently. People frequently make assumptions regarding the intentions and motives of others, which can create misunderstandings. Errors in judgment, such as attribution biases, may increase the likelihood of disagreements. Conflict is particularly likely when situations are ambiguous because ambiguity contributes to inaccurate perceptions and incorrect judgments (Gelfand et al., 2012). More recent research suggests that conflict perceptions are often asymmetrical and may differ significantly across team members, influencing both communication and performance outcomes (Boroş, 2021).

Differences in values, attitudes, and beliefs are common sources of conflict because individuals possess varying ideas regarding appropriate behaviour and priorities. Employees who value autonomy and independence, for example, may react negatively to close supervision or excessive control. Differences in values between individuals and groups may create divisions and reduce group cohesion, potentially resulting in lower satisfaction and weaker commitment among members (Jehn, Northcraft, & Neale, 1999).

Personality traits and individual needs play important roles in both the development and management of conflict. Differences in personal goals and motivations may create incompatible expectations among individuals. Research indicates that personality dimensions, particularly agreeableness and extraversion, significantly influence conflict resolution styles (Wood & Bell, 2008). Individuals with higher levels of agreeableness are generally more willing to compromise and preserve relationships (Amanatullah, Morris, & Curhan, 2008), whereas individuals with lower levels of agreeableness often

prefer more assertive approaches to conflict resolution (Graziano, Jensen-Campbell, & Hair, 1996).

Differences related to age, gender, ethnicity, race, culture, and organizational experience may also influence conflict within organizations. (Stahl et al., 2010; van Knippenberg et al., 2013). Research has shown that teams with diverse functional backgrounds are more likely to experience task-related conflict, while differences related to race and organizational tenure may contribute to emotional conflict (Pelled et al., 1999). Additionally, groups characterized by highly diverse values may experience lower satisfaction and commitment among members (Jehn et al., 1999). However, factors such as strong team orientation, process focus, and shared group identity may improve the effectiveness of diverse teams (Mohammed & Angell, 2004; Polzer et al., 2002).

Understanding these triggers of conflict allows organizations to identify potential sources of disagreement and implement strategies aimed at minimizing negative consequences while promoting effective conflict management.

#### **4. Intergroup and intragroup conflict**

Organizations consist of multiple groups and departments that interact with one another while pursuing different responsibilities and objectives. These groups are often separated by faultlines, which refer to distinguishing characteristics or boundaries that differentiate one group from another (Jehn & Bezrukova, 2010). Faultlines may emerge intentionally through organizational design or develop naturally from differences among employees and work units.

Within organizations, faultlines are commonly created through structural arrangements such as functional specialization, product specialization, or geographical separation of units (Polzer, Crisp, Jarvenpaa, & Kim, 2006). In addition, formal distinctions in status between various managerial levels can also create boundaries between groups (Jiatao & Hambrick, 2005). Such organizational faultlines are usually visible and recognized by members because they are embedded within the organizational structure. However, faultlines based on demographic factors such as race, ethnicity, or other social

characteristics may remain less visible until particular circumstances make group differences more prominent (Jehn & Bezrukova, 2010).

*Intergroup conflict* can produce both positive and negative consequences for organizations. On the positive side, conflict between groups may increase motivation and encourage members to work more effectively in order to protect their group interests or improve group performance relative to others. Intergroup competition may also strengthen group cohesion because members often unite around common goals and coordinate their efforts to present a collective position. Internal disagreements within the group may be temporarily reduced because divisions could weaken the group during conflict situations. Furthermore, during periods of intergroup conflict, members may become more willing to accept directive or autocratic leadership if they believe such leadership will improve the group's position (Meyer et al., 2015).

Despite these potential benefits, intergroup conflict often creates significant challenges. Groups involved in conflict frequently develop negative perceptions of opposing groups and may begin to view them as threats or competitors. Such perceptions can increase hostility and reduce trust among groups. Members often become more attentive to the actions of the opposing group while simultaneously reducing communication and cooperation. As a result, a win–lose mentality may emerge, where groups focus primarily on achieving their own objectives at the expense of others.

Research suggests that these behaviours can negatively affect organizational performance and group effectiveness. For example, demographic faultlines within joint venture management teams have been associated with increased task and emotional conflict, behavioural fragmentation, and reduced performance (Jiatao & Hambrick, 2005). Similarly, faultlines resulting from geographical dispersion have been linked to higher levels of conflict and lower intergroup trust, particularly when groups are relatively homogeneous in nationality (Polzer et al., 2006). Conflict within teams often originates at individual or dyadic levels rather than emerging uniformly across entire groups, suggesting that conflict dynamics may evolve differently across team structures (Shah et al., 2021). Furthermore, when faultlines become highly visible and significant to group members, organizations often experience lower employee satisfaction, reduced group

performance, and the formation of competing coalitions within teams (Jehn & Bezrukova, 2010).

Therefore, while intergroup conflict may enhance group solidarity and motivation in some situations, unmanaged or highly salient faultlines can create divisions that weaken collaboration and negatively affect organizational outcomes. Effective management of intergroup relationships is therefore essential to maintain cooperation and support overall organizational performance.

*Intragroup conflict* refers to disagreements and tensions that occur among members within the same group or team. Managers are frequently required to oversee teams and work groups where conflict may arise both among team members and between team members and their leaders. While group dynamics and team behaviour are discussed more broadly in studies of organizational groups, conflict management within project teams requires particular attention because of the complexity and interdependent nature of project work.

Several factors commonly contribute to conflict within project teams. These include deadlines, competing project priorities, managerial procedures, technical compromises, team composition decisions, cost control issues, scheduling concerns, and personality differences (Thamhain, 1975). Such issues can create tension because project environments often involve uncertainty, interdependence, and pressure to achieve specific objectives within limited timeframes.

The importance of particular conflict issues often varies depending on the stage of the project lifecycle (Jehn & Mannix, 2001). Although deadlines remain a consistent source of conflict throughout a project, other factors become more prominent during specific phases (Lock, 2007). During the initial stage of a project, conflict frequently centers on deadlines, cost estimates, task assignments, and the allocation of resources (Graham, 1982). These disagreements often occur because projects frequently involve innovation, uncertainty, and team members who may lack experience with particular aspects of the work. The early stage of project development is particularly significant because it often influences later team functioning. Research suggests that effective teams typically begin with relatively low levels of process and relationship conflict, although both forms of conflict may increase as the project progresses (Jehn & Mannix, 2001). Additionally,

studies indicate that teams initially characterized by high levels of trust may later experience decrease in trust, lower levels of individual autonomy, and weaker task interdependence (Curseu & Schrujjer, 2010; Langfred, 2007). Team composition also influences conflict and performance outcomes. In diverse teams, members who demonstrate greater interpersonal similarity tend to show higher creativity, stronger social integration, and reduced task conflict during later stages of the project. Conversely, teams with low levels of interpersonal congruence often demonstrate lower overall effectiveness (Polzer, Milton, & Swann Jr., 2002).

During the middle stages of a project, conflicts often emerge regarding deadlines, management procedures, and technical decisions, which may require compromises among team members (Archibald, 1992). Additional sources of conflict during this phase include issues related to managerial autonomy, task interdependence, project administration, and performance evaluation criteria (De Wit et al., 2012).

In the final stage of a project, pressures associated with costs and deadlines frequently become dominant sources of conflict. At this stage, tensions regarding project completion and performance expectations may create management challenges. However, when team members possess a strong sense of ownership and commitment toward the project, increased cooperation can contribute to resolving such conflicts more effectively.

As project teams encounter and address conflicts throughout the project lifecycle, they often undergo changes in structure and interaction patterns (Langfred, 2007). The team leader plays a critical role in guiding this process and influencing the effectiveness of conflict resolution. Research suggests that the initial project meeting or project kickoff stage is particularly important because it establishes expectations, roles, and communication patterns that influence later team performance (Thoms, 1998).

Leadership qualities also significantly affect conflict management within teams. Leaders with high levels of emotional intelligence and empathy are often perceived as more effective in managing teams because they demonstrate greater ability to understand and regulate emotions among team members (Clarke). Such leaders are generally better equipped to manage interpersonal relationships and facilitate cooperation, contributing to more effective team performance and conflict resolution (Ayoko & Callan, 2010; Ayoko et al., 2014).

## 5. Diagnosing Conflict

Understanding conflict requires examining a set of key dimensions that shape how disputes develop and how difficult they are to resolve (Greenglass, 1986). These dimensions provide a framework for analysing the nature of a conflict situation and include: the issue in question, the size of the stakes, the interdependence of the parties, the continuity of interaction, leadership, the involvement of third parties, and perceived progress.

The nature of the issue strongly influences how easily a conflict can be resolved. When disagreements are framed as matters of principle involving deeply held values or belief systems, resolution becomes more complex. In such cases, parties may prioritize winning or preserving “face” over addressing the substantive issue, which further escalates the conflict. By contrast, conflicts involving divisible or negotiable issues—such as financial resources—are generally easier to resolve, as compromise allows both parties to achieve partial satisfaction.

The magnitude of what is at stake also affects the intensity of conflict. When outcomes involve significant resources or highly valued objectives, disagreements tend to be more prolonged and difficult to settle. In organizational settings, disputes over substantial budget allocations, for example, often generate extended negotiation, as each party perceives the outcome as critical to its own performance and goals.

The degree of interdependence between conflicting parties is a central factor in conflict diagnosis. In zero-sum situations, one party’s gain directly corresponds to the other’s loss, making resolution more challenging. In contrast, positive-sum situations allow for mutual gain through compromise and cooperation. Effective communication can sometimes transform a zero-sum perception into a more integrative solution, as illustrated by bargaining scenarios where parties discover complementary interests that allow both to benefit.

The nature of the ongoing relationship between parties also shapes conflict outcomes. When parties expect continued interaction in the future, such as long-term business partners or internal organizational units, they are more likely to seek compromise in order

to preserve the relationship. Conversely, when no future interaction is anticipated, parties may adopt more competitive or rigid negotiation strategies, making resolution more difficult.

Leadership structure plays an important role in conflict resolution. When each side is represented by a clear and authoritative leader who has decision-making power, negotiations tend to be more efficient and predictable. However, when leadership is fragmented or lacks authority, agreements become harder to reach, as commitments may not be fully supported or implemented by all relevant stakeholders.

The presence of third parties, such as mediators or arbitrators, can facilitate conflict resolution by introducing an objective perspective. These actors can help identify potential compromises and reduce bias, particularly in situations where the conflicting parties are highly invested in their own positions and unable to view alternative solutions objectively.

Finally, the way parties perceive the progress of the conflict significantly influences its resolution. When both sides believe that concessions are being made fairly, negotiations are more likely to succeed. However, if one party perceives that it has suffered greater losses or received fewer concessions, it may resist further compromise until a sense of balance is restored.

## **6. Styles of Responding to Conflict**

Individuals differ in how they respond to conflict situations. Some tend to disengage at the first sign of disagreement, while others are more inclined to engage directly. Once involved, behaviour varies along different patterns of interaction. Building on established conflict frameworks, five primary conflict-handling styles are commonly identified, with empirical support for their validity: avoiding, accommodating, competing, compromising, collaborating (Blake & Mouton, 1969; Thomas & Kilmann, 1974; Van de Vliert & Kabanoff, 1990).

These styles can be understood through a two-dimensional model (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). One dimension reflects the degree of concern for one's own interests

(assertiveness), while the other reflects concern for the interests of others (cooperativeness). High assertiveness indicates a strong focus on personal goals, whereas high cooperativeness reflects emphasis on maintaining relationships and addressing the other party's needs.

The avoiding style is characterized by withdrawal from conflict rather than engagement. Individuals may physically or psychologically distance themselves from disagreement by changing the topic, remaining silent, or denying that a conflict exists. This approach is often associated with discomfort in conflict situations or a desire to reduce stress, particularly among individuals who prefer to avoid emotionally demanding interactions.

Avoidance may be appropriate when issues are trivial, when the potential costs of engagement exceed the benefits, or when there is insufficient information to act effectively. It can also be strategically useful when time is needed for emotions to settle or when others are better positioned to resolve the issue. In some complex task environments, limited avoidance may even help teams maintain focus on performance rather than interpersonal tension (De Dreu & Van Vianen, 2001).

Accommodating style involves prioritizing the concerns of others over one's own interests. Individuals adopting this style willingly cede their position to preserve relationships or reduce tension. This approach is often linked to high concern for interpersonal harmony and a tendency toward agreeableness (Amanatullah et al., 2008).

Accommodation can be constructive when the issue is more important to the other party, when one recognizes being wrong, or when preserving the relationship is more valuable than the outcome of the dispute. It may also serve as a gesture of goodwill that strengthens long-term cooperation.

The competing style reflects a strong focus on personal goals at the expense of others. Conflict is viewed as a situation to be won, and individuals using this approach tend to be assertive and uncooperative. Typical behaviours include persuasion, argumentation, and the use of authority or pressure. This style can be effective in urgent situations requiring decisive action or when firm leadership is necessary, such as in crises or enforcement of critical decisions. It may also be appropriate when defending against exploitation. However, excessive reliance on competition can damage relationships and reduce team effectiveness (Somech, Desivilya, & Lidogoster, 2009).

Compromising style involves finding a middle ground through mutual concessions. Rather than fully satisfying either party, this approach aims for a workable solution that is acceptable to all involved. It typically involves negotiation, bargaining, and trade-offs.

Compromise is particularly useful when parties have equal power, when goals are mutually exclusive, or when time constraints limit deeper problem solving. It may also serve as a temporary solution when more comprehensive resolution is not immediately possible.

Collaborating style reflects a high level of concern for both personal and others' interests, with an emphasis on jointly developing solutions that satisfy all parties. It is a problem-solving approach that requires openness, trust, and active information sharing.

This style is most effective when the issues are complex, when both sides have important concerns, or when long-term relationships are at stake. Collaboration encourages creativity and can strengthen relationships by increasing mutual understanding. When successful, it often leads to high commitment to the agreed solution.

No single conflict style is universally optimal. Overuse or underuse of any approach can lead to negative outcomes. Effective conflict management therefore requires flexibility: the ability to diagnose the situation, select an appropriate response style, and adjust behaviour accordingly. Managers, in particular, benefit from developing competence in all five styles to respond effectively across different conflict contexts.

## **7. Conflict Management**

Conflict management is an important soft skill, that refers to the active role taken by managers in identifying, addressing, and intervening in conflict situations when necessary. Rather than eliminating conflict entirely, the objective is to manage it constructively, using a range of approaches that extend from prevention to resolution. Although avoiding conflict can sometimes be useful, excessive avoidance may be harmful because it allows underlying problems to persist unresolved. Many individuals tend to rely on a dominant conflict style, often limiting their ability to adapt to different

situations. However, effective managers benefit from developing flexibility across multiple styles, enabling them to respond appropriately to varying conflict conditions and reducing the risks associated with overreliance on a single approach. It has been confirmed the continued validity of these styles while emphasizing situational adaptability and the importance of managing conflict processes rather than focusing exclusively on conflict types (Gross & Guerrero, 2014; O'Neill et al., 2018; O'Neill et al., 2018; Zajac et al., 2021).

*Confrontation techniques* involve directly addressing conflict rather than avoiding or suppressing it. These methods require the parties involved to engage openly with the issues and work toward a constructive resolution. The central objective is to reach a mutually acceptable agreement through dialogue and collaboration, rather than withdrawal or unilateral concession. This approach demands openness, cooperation, and a willingness to exchange information and perspectives. In many cases, confrontation processes involve third-party assistance. These third parties, such as internal HR professionals, external consultants, or trained mediators, help structure the discussion, ensure balanced participation, and facilitate communication. They may guide procedural steps, provide impartial perspectives, and help clarify issues, and in some cases, they may even make binding decisions, depending on their formal authority.

*Bargaining* is primarily a compromise-oriented approach, though in practice it often incorporates a mix of strategies, including competition, accommodation, and collaboration. Parties may negotiate by making concessions, applying pressure, or exchanging resources to reach an acceptable outcome.

The nature of bargaining is strongly influenced by the expected duration of the relationship between parties. When interactions are short-term or one-off, individuals are more likely to adopt aggressive bargaining tactics. In contrast, when parties expect ongoing interaction, such as in labour–management relations, bargaining tends to be more balanced and relationship-conscious.

*Mediation* involves the use of a neutral third party who facilitates negotiation between conflicting parties. Unlike arbitrators, mediators do not impose decisions. Instead, they assist by improving communication, reducing tension, and helping parties explore

possible solutions. Their role is primarily advisory and procedural, aimed at supporting the parties in reaching a voluntary agreement.

*Arbitration* is a more formal conflict resolution method in which a third party evaluates the arguments of both sides and makes a binding decision. This approach is commonly used in labour disputes or cases where negotiation has reached an impasse. The arbitrator typically reviews evidence, listens to both parties, and then issues a final ruling that both sides are required to accept.

*Principled negotiation* is a collaborative approach to conflict resolution that focuses on separating people from problems and emphasizing mutual gain (Fischer, 1991). It contrasts with “soft” approaches, which prioritize accommodation, and “hard” approaches, which emphasize competitive winning. The method is based on four key principles.

1. Separate the people from the problem: conflicts should be depersonalized so that emotional reactions do not dominate the discussion. Parties are encouraged to express perceptions and concerns constructively, listen actively, and avoid blame. The focus remains on the issue rather than on individuals.
2. Focus on interests, not positions. Rather than defending fixed positions, parties should clarify underlying interests. This helps shift attention from rigid demands to underlying needs, allowing for greater flexibility and understanding in negotiation.
3. Generate options for mutual benefit. Parties should jointly explore multiple possible solutions without premature evaluation. This encourages creativity and increases the likelihood of identifying outcomes that satisfy both sides.
4. Use objective criteria. Final decisions should be guided by fair and transparent standards, such as equity, feasibility, and sustainability. Objective evaluation helps reduce bias and increases acceptance of the agreed solution.

## **8. Conclusion: improving organizational responses to conflict**

Because many conflicts originate in organizational structure and systems, effective conflict management often requires changes at the organizational level.

Conflict can be reduced when organizations create shared goals that require cooperation between units. When departments work together toward common objectives, interdependence increases and intergroup conflict tends to decrease. Unclear roles and responsibilities are a frequent source of conflict. Organizations can reduce ambiguity through clear job descriptions, formal reporting structures, and well-defined authority relationships, thereby minimizing overlap and jurisdictional disputes. Well-designed policies can reduce conflict by standardizing expectations and ensuring fairness. However, poorly designed or overly rigid rules may create resentment and increase tension, so careful balancing is required. Conflicts arising from limited resources can often be reduced by redistributing or increasing resources. Adjusting staffing, equipment, or scheduling can help eliminate competition that otherwise fuels disagreement. Communication structures can either reduce or intensify conflict. In some cases, limiting direct interaction or formalizing communication channels can reduce interpersonal tension and misunderstandings. Rotating employees across departments can improve understanding of different roles and reduce intergroup misunderstanding. This broader perspective can promote cooperation and reduce stereotyped perceptions. Reward structures strongly influence behaviour. Systems that emphasize cooperation, shared outcomes, or team-based incentives can reduce internal competition and encourage collaborative behaviour. Recent evidence also highlights the value of structured team-development interventions and communication training programs for strengthening conflict management capabilities and improving team effectiveness (Zajac et al., 2021; Putz et al., 2022). This includes exposure to structured techniques such as negotiation, collaboration, and mediation.

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