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CONFLICT MANAGEMENT COMPETENCE BY UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Abstract:

Conflict situations are an integral part of the work and the inability to resolve conflict is the biggest source of stress and dissatisfaction in the workplace. The aim of paper is to analyse conflict management strategies by university students. Reseach question is what choices of strategies for resolving conflict is prefered by university students.The paper is based on the analysis of available scientific literature about coflict resolution strategies and on the analysis of the results questionnaire survey among students of the Masaryk Institute of Advanced Studies of the Czech Technical University in Prague. Our study shows that students choose the easiest strategy for resolving conflict – compromise or prefer to avoid conflict. The results show the need to learn and practice appropriate strategies for conflict management among students.

Keywords:

Competence, Social Competence, Interpersonal Conflict, Strategies for Conflict Management

JEL Classification: D74, I23, A14

Introduction

The most common request of companies from the candidates for the various positions (especially management positions) is the ability to resolve conflicts as one of the key competencies, because conflict situations are an integral part of the work, but also personal life and the inability to resolve conflict is the biggest source of stress and dissatisfaction in the workplace, and generally in relationships.

The aim of paper is to analyse the interpersonal conflicts and strategies for resolving conflict by university students. Research question is what choices of strategies for resolving conflict is prefered by current university students.

Workplace conflict wastes the time of managers, impacting the bottom lines of organizations, and impacting the growth and development of the organizations (Alzawahreh & Khasawneh, 2011). The study showed that managers spent up to 20 percent of their valuable time dealing with organizational conflict and that conflict management is an issue of increasing importance within the organization (Thomas & Schmidt, 1976)

Literature review

Further researches described that the frequency of incidents of interpersonal conflict at work ranged from 25% to 50% of an employee's work day (Hahn, 2000). Employees involved in conflict miss an average of 6% more work, and pay out an average of 50% more in healthcare costs than employees reporting no conflict (Kittusamy & Buchholz, 2004; Raak & Raak, 2003). In addition, interpersonal conflict for job has been identified as a determinant factor of work disability (Appelberg, Romanov, Heikkilä, Honkasalo, & Koskenvuo, 1996) and a predictor of workplace accidents (Oi-Ling, Phillips, & Tat-Wing, 2004). The Canadian research, conducted by Psychometrics company in 2008, showed, that almost all HR professionals (99%) deal with conflict. The most common causes of conflict are warring egos and personality clashes (86%), poor leadership (73%), lack of honesty (67%), stress (64%), and clashing values (59%). These conflicts frequently result in negative outcomes. Three out of four (76%) have seen conflict result in personal insults and attacks, and 43% have witnessed someone being fired. 81% of those surveyed have seen conflict lead to someone leaving the organization, and 77% have seen it result in sickness or absence. But workplace conflict can also have benefits. HR professionals have seen conflict lead to better solutions to problems and challenges (57%), major innovations (21%), increased motivation (31%), a better understanding of others (77%), and higher work team performance (40%).

By R.S. Lulofs and D.D. Cahn (2000 in: Výrost, Slaměník, 2009) there are two views of the conflict. One set of views represents the definition of a conflict in terms of disrupting the normal functioning of the system. This also implies the orientation of approaches to conflict studies that are focused on learning how to reduce and control conflict. The second group of authors considers conflict to be a part of all relationships

and is based on the assumption that conflict is a natural and inevitable part of life, and people have to learn to manage conflicts through the development of social skills.

In our article we perceive conflicts as an inevitable fact of human existence. Conflict is a normal, and even healthy, part of relationships. After all, two people can't be expected to agree on everything at all times. Result of the conflict depends on the way it solves. There are many different strategies to handling conflict; however, not all of them are wise strategies. Most of us use conflict skills that we observed growing up, some of us observed good conflict resolution, while others observed faulty conflict resolution.

Since relationship conflicts are inevitable, learning to deal with them in a healthy way is crucial. When conflict is mismanaged, it can harm the relationship. But when handled in a respectful and positive way, conflict provides an opportunity for growth, ultimately strengthening the bond between two people. By learning the skills we need for successful conflict resolution, we can keep your personal and professional relationships strong and growing.

The challenge is managing conflict in a way that leads to positive conclusions. Given the number and frequency of negative outcomes of conflict, and the impact of the positive ones, it is not surprisingly that nine out of ten rate the ability to handle conflict as either a very important or critical leadership skill.

Conflict is a widely defined topic within the literature. No ideal definition for interpersonal conflict. Different researchers have different views about "Interpersonal conflict" based on their researches." In western literature, the conflict is considered as a series of disagreement or incompatibility between opinions and principles (Jehn & Bendersky, 2003). People view it as interference or blocking behavior. Others believe it as negative emotions, such as stress, anxiety, depression and anger (Bodtker & Jameson, 2001; Thomas, 1992). Conflict occurs when an individual perceives differences with others about interests, beliefs, or values that are important (Starks, 2006) or perceives interference with the accomplishment of goals (Greenberg et al., 2003). Rahim (2002) expanded on this definition, specifying that conflict is "an interactive process manifested in an incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities" (Rahim, 2002, p. 207).

Hocker & Wilmot (2007) in their book define interpersonal conflict as "An expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from the other party in achieving their goals". Similarly, Kohoutek defines the conflict (2006) as a sharp dispute, verbal or brachial clash, collision, disagreement, contradiction of opposing tendencies, and the need to choose between them. R.S. Lulofs and D.D. Cahn (2000) point to the fact that not every inconsistency of goals, opinions and interests will result in conflict. (in: Výrost, Slaměník, 2009).

Strategies for resolving conflicts. The majority of scholars have agreed upon the five patterns of conflict management styles introduced by Black and Mouton in 1964 and

expanded by Thomas and Killman (1975) as well as Rahim (1983). Rahim categorized the five patterns approach as follows: avoiding, obliging, dominating, integrating, and compromising. Avoiding is associated with intentionally withdrawing from the conflict situation, with a low concern for others as well as a low concern for self. The obliging style focuses on areas of agreement and sets aside differences. This style tends to reflect the individuals' concern with others' needs over personal needs and views. Dominating reflects low concern for others and a high concern for self and is described as forcing one's own views on others. The integrating style reflects high concern for others and high concern for self, an approach that strives to integrate the views of all those involved. The final conflict management style, of compromising, reflects moderate concern for all and is associated with finding a middle ground based on a common solution that addresses everyone's interest

In a study investigating the conflict management styles of managers from collectivistic (Japan, China, Korea,Taiwan, and the Middle East) and individualistic societies (the United States), the authors found that the managers from collectivistic societies were less confrontational, and more likely to use a group interaction to overcome conflict compared to their individualistic manager counterparts (Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). Rahim (2001) found that individualists tend to use dominating or obliging approaches in solving their interpersonal conflicts, while their collectivist counterparts use integrative (such as collaborative or accommodation) approaches

In fact, conflict management styles (CMS) have been the focus of considerable research for decades. Studies have found that cooperative styles of conflict handling, in which more concern is shown for others, generally yield beneficial outcomes in the workplace, whereas uncooperative styles generally produce negative outcomes (e.g., Meyer, 2004; Ohbuchi & Kitanaka, 1991; Rahim & Buntzman, 1989; WeiderHatfield & Hatfield, 1996). Other studies show that CMS of managers is related to various outcomes of subordinates, such as job satisfaction, supervision satisfaction, supervisor–subordinate relationships, long-term cooperation, and attitudinal and behavioral compliance (Alexander, 1995; Blake & Mouton, 1964; Follett, 1940; Rahim, 1986; Thomas & Kilmann, 1974; Weider-Hatfield & Hatfield, 1996)

Methodology

The aim of paper is analyses of interpersonal conflicts and strategies for resolving conflict by university students. Reseach question is what choices of strategies for resolving conflict is prefered by current university students

The sample for this study consisted of students of the third year of bachelor´s study of the Masaryk Institute of Advanced Studies of the Czech Technical University in Prague. Of the 170 questionnaires distributed, 161 students responded, yielding a response rate of 94,7 %. Eleven of the returned questionnaires were excluded from the analysis because it was not complete. The final response rate for usable questionnaires was 88,2 %. Of the total 150 subjects, 62 % were female. The age of respondents ranged

from 22 to 24 years. Survey was administered at the schooll during psychology lessons. The survey was conducted from October 2017 to January 2018.

In this study was used the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI), which assesses an individual's behavior in conflict situations—that is, situations in which the concerns of two people appear to be incompatible. In conflict situations is described a person's behavior along two basic dimensions: 1) assertiveness, the extent to which the individual attempts to satisfy his or her own concerns, and 2) cooperativeness, the extent to which the individual attempts to satisfy the other person's concerns. These two dimensions of behavior can be used to define five methods of dealing with conflict. These five conflict-handling modes are shown below:

Figure 1. Two-dimensional taxonomy of conflict handling styles.

Note The figure presents a merged version of the figures shown by Rahim (1983, p. 369) and Thomas and Kilman (1974, p. 11).
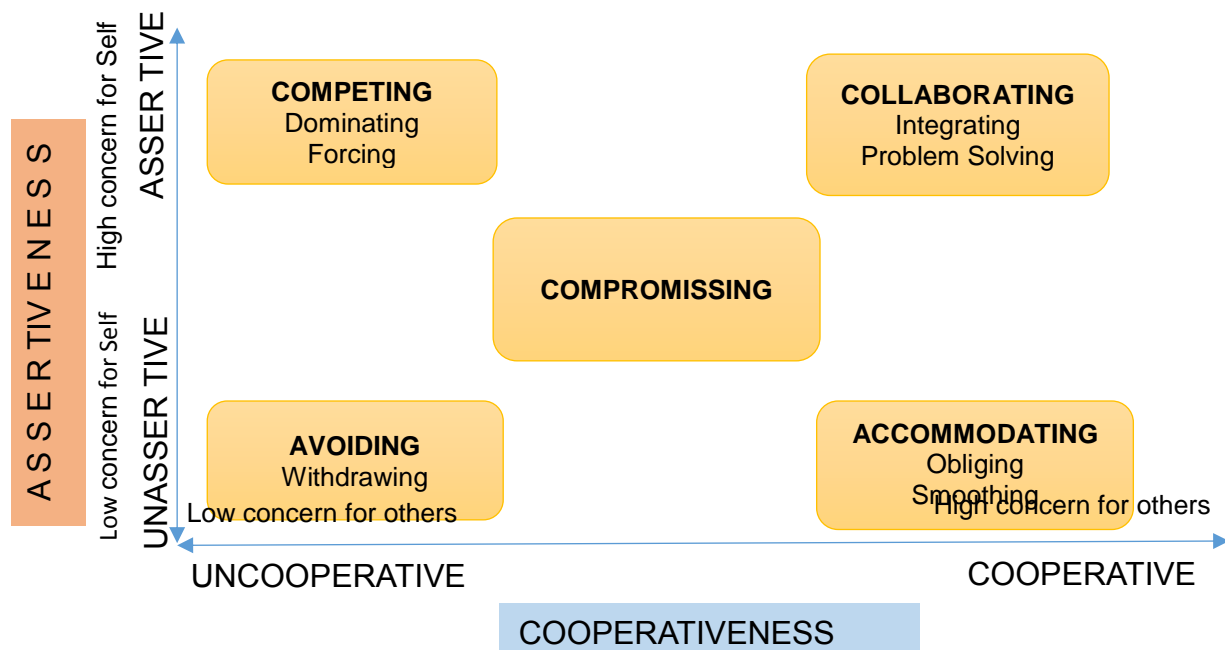
Source: own adjustment on Rahim (1983, p. 369) and Thomas and Kilman (1974, p. 11).

Results and discussion

The most common and prevalent style used by students to resolve conflicts is the style of compromise (43%), the second one is avoiding (20%), the next one is accomodating, (15%), competing (12%), and the least common is collaborative style (10%).
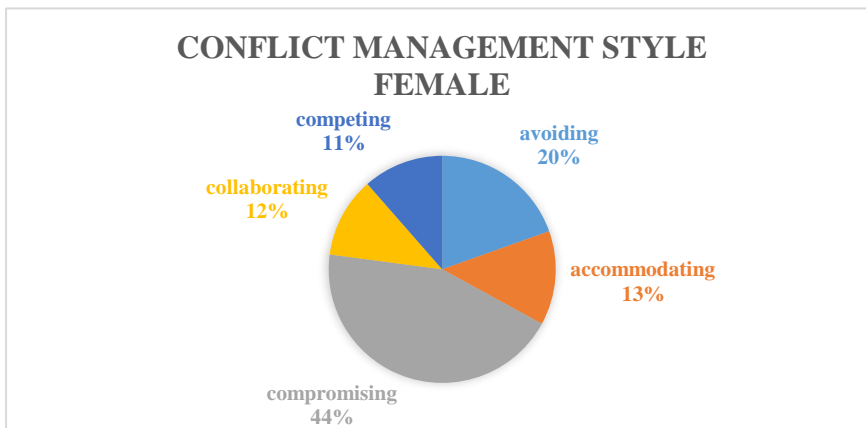
The picture shows that students prefer cooperative style, as confirmed by Hofstede's, Toomey's & Oetzel's, Rahim's research (Hofstede´s, 2001, TingToomey & Oetzel, 2001, Rahim 2001).

Figure 1: Conflict Management Style – All students
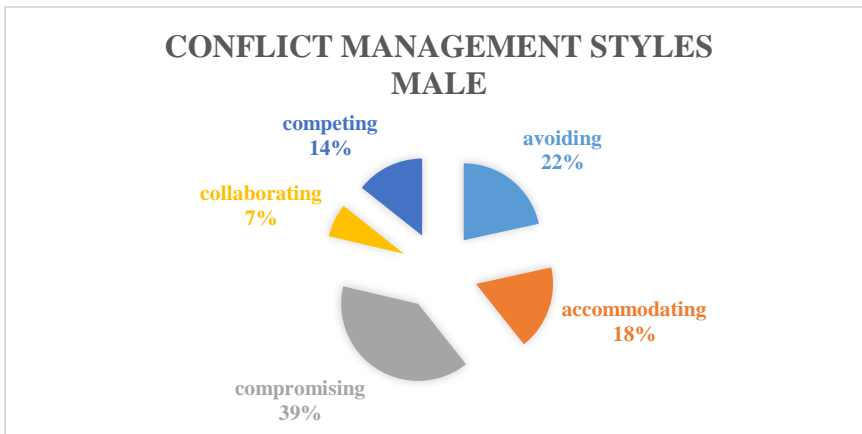

Source: own calculations

Figure 2: Conflict Management Style – Female
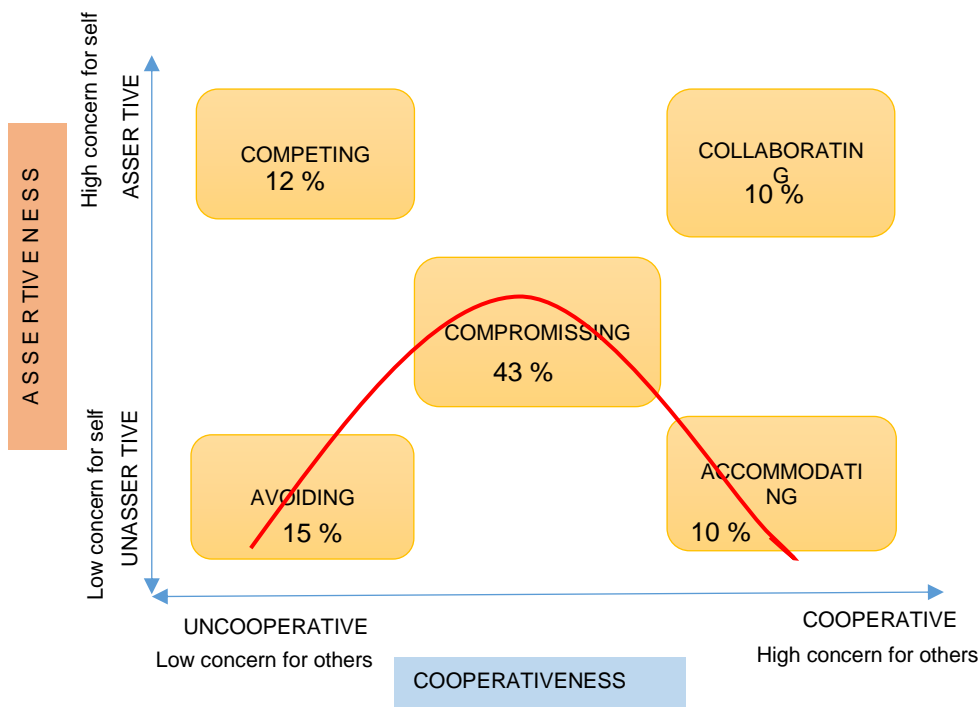

Source: own calculations

There are no significant differences in the use of CMS (conflict management style) in terms of gender. Yet we can note that men choose a more avoiding and accommodating (40%) than women (33%).

Figure 3: Conflict Management Style – Male

Source: own calculations

Figure 4: Confllict Management Style - Preference

Source: own calculations

Students are more oriented to use a compromise style. Compromising looks for an expedient and mutually acceptable solution which partially satisfies both parties. Compromising is a faster and easier solution. The compromise does not require discussion or any communicative techniques. This is confirmed by unintended observations of authors during teaching in simulated conflict situations – no questions, no listening, no argumentation. There are disadvatage of a compromise solution: may result in a situation when both parties are not satisfied with the outcome (a lose-lose situation), does not contribute to building trust in the long run, may require close monitoring and control to ensure the agreements are met.

The second style, who students prefer, is avoiding (also known as withdrawing). They often do not pursue their own concerns or those of the opponent. They disagree with the conflict, sidestep, postpone or simply withdraw. They often say: I do not care, it is not important.

The third one is accommodating also known as smoothing. Smoothing is accommodating the concerns of other people first of all, rather than one's own concerns. All three solutions show that students do not know or do not use appropriate communication techniques to achieve mutually beneficial solutions and satisfaction.

Conclusions

The aim of paper is to analyse the interpersonal conflicts and strategies for resolving conflict by university students. Reseach question is what choices of strategies for resolving conflict is prefered by current university students.

- Our study shows that students choose the easiest strategy for resolving conflict – compromise or prefer to avoid conflict.

- Students have problems with using conflict management styles. All three solutions show that students do not know or do not use appropriate communication techniques to achieve mutually beneficial solutions and satisfaction.

- Management from organisations have problems with young employees with strategies to resolving conflicts.

Since relationship conflicts are inevitable, learning to deal with them in a healthy way is crucial. When conflict is mismanaged, it can harm the relationship. But when handled in a respectful and positive way, conflict provides an opportunity for growth, ultimately strengthening the bond between two people. By teaching students the skills, which they need for successful conflict resolution, we can keep their personal and professional relationships strong and growing.

The challenge is managing conflict in a way that leads to positive conclusions. Given the number and frequency of negative outcomes of conflict, and the impact of the positive ones, it is not surprisingly that nine out of ten rate the ability to handle conflict as either a very important or critical leadership skill.

Recommendations

- Development of theoretical knowledge, practical skills and social habits of students in conflict resolving strategy.

- Application of interactive teaching methods.

- Creation of educational programs in collaboration with suitable employers.

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