

4th International Conference on Leadership, Technology, Innovation and Business Management

A study on the impact of communication system on interpersonal conflict

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to survey the effect of organizational communication system on the conflict in management institutions based in NCR region. The study is based descriptive and correlation research design. The employees working in management institutions in NCR region were included in the sample for this study (N= 137). A self made questionnaire along with a demographic sheet was used as investigation instruments. Validity of study instrument was confirmed through opinions of professors, assistant professors and lecturers; working in different management institutions in NCR region. The reliability of the measuring instruments was calculated by cronbach's alpha coefficient. Descriptive statistics (frequency distribution, percentage, mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (Binomial test, chi square test, Spearman coefficient tests, Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis tests) were used in the study. Based on the result of chi square test, there is significant difference between organizational communication system and interpersonal conflict. The most of participants evaluate communication in an informal way and pointed out that the communication channels were not open. Based on the result of binomial test, interpersonal conflict was found existing in different management institutes in NCR region.

Keywords: Organizational Communication, Interpersonal Conflict, Management Effectiveness and Performance

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Peer-review under responsibility of the International Conference on Leadership, Technology, Innovation and Business Management

1.Introduction

Communication is a very crucial aspect inside any organization especially if it is used by managers. In the last decade, because of the information technology, the working environment has changed. In

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fact, almost everything has become more rapid and more sophisticated. The globalization, technology and quick rate of change resulted in changing employee's perceptions about their job and their working environment.

This new atmosphere made the employees look for a stronger voice; a role in decision-making and meaningful responsibilities regarding organization's performance. These features cannot be established without communication. Communication is an important aspect in the managers' hands to improve organization's performance (Axley 1996).

Because the purpose of organizations is to coordinate employees' tasks, to inform, persuade, seek information, coordinate and reward. However misuse of communication by managers can lead to lying, cajoling, controlling, misinforming, distorting and misrepresenting (Heath, 1994). Communication between the superior and subordinate is essential because it creates a better working environment. Communication is considered the glue that ties the employees with the organization to achieve its goal (Taylor, 1993).

In fact, communication facilitates employees' task; it enable them to know the organization's goal, how they can achieve it and what their role is in each task (Mogel, 2002). Communication is needed inside organizations, as well as outside the organization, to be aware of any problem, analyze the elements of the problem, come up with different options for solving the problems, specify the required actions and evaluate the results through feedback (Clocke & Goldsmith, 2000, p.199).

The theoretical development of this study was limited to the concept of Interpersonal conflict. Interpersonal Conflict usually arises when one party feels another is trying to prevent his/her goals from being achieved (Antonioni, 1998). Similarly, Ohbuchi and Fukushima (1997) describe interpersonal conflict as an event in which an individual potentially jeopardizes another's goals, wishes, or expectations. In organizations, interpersonal conflict is prevalent and troublesome for managers (Putnam, 1988). Meyer, Gemmell and Irving (1997) reported that middle managers are spending 25 per cent of their time in handling conflict. When deciding the most effective method for managing conflict, the conflict itself needs to be evaluated. In order to increase individual, group, and system-wide effectiveness, organizational conflicts are often managed with a temporary or doable solution, instead of being resolved (Rahim, et.al. 1992).

This paper attempts to achieve two goals: to investigate the effect of organizational communications system on the conflict among the employees in the management institutes based in NCR region, and to identify the present dominant organizational communications system and interpersonal conflict in those management institutes. The major question of this study is "does interpersonal conflict exist in management institutes or not?" In this study, organizational communications system is independent variable and interpersonal conflict is chosen as dependant variable. This is the first study dealing with communication strategies for interpersonal conflict at management institutional level in NCR region. As such, the current study can be considered to break new ground in communication strategies in management institutes.

2.Literature Review

Organizational communication is a crucial aspect for the effectiveness of organizations and of individuals inside an organization. On-going patterns of interaction among people within organizations are characterized as planned, sequential and systematic. While communication is

the connection among individuals, at the same time, it helps individuals in creating awareness (Neher, 1997). Cloke and Goldsmith (2000) stated those employees' reactions to conflict may take different styles, such as litigation, strike, poor moral or reduced productivity due to miscommunication. They believe that any type of conflict can be "avoidable" if the organization opens communication channels through dialogue (p.2). Communication with employees should be on-going and consistent; especially when organizations need guidance or when there is opposition to changes inside the organization (Dawson, 2003).

According to McCroskey (1997), human communication behaviour is the product of at least two interacting factors: an individual's predispositions (traits) and situational constraints on his or her communication behaviour at a given time (states). On the other hand, conflict, by definition is the "disagreement between people or groups" (Long Man dictionary, 1997, p.158). Kim and Leung (2000) define conflict as "communicative exchange between at least two interdependent parties who have different, opposite, or incompatible opinions and goals and who perceive that the other is interfering in the achievement of his or her goals" (p.231). Dealing and handling conflict may differ based on the original environment of the culture.

Cloke and Goldsmith (2000) suggested eight different ways to avoid conflict. They believe that there is no guaranteed way to resolve a conflict, however, these eight steps can aid organizations to confront and resolve any conflict, two ideas out of the eight that seem to be important are: (1) discovering the meaning of conflict and (2) establishing open channels of communication to resolve problems (p.2) (3) By understanding the meaning of conflict an organization can increase the awareness, acceptance and resolution of conflicts. Likewise, through collaborative negotiations to create communication channels, the cause and solutions are more easily identified.

Cloke and Goldsmith (2000) differentiated between the types of communication, as well. They claim that some organizations communicate to settle a conflict, while others may communicate to resolve a conflict (p.12). Thus, organizations that are just interested in pacifying their employees, most likely have little interest in feedback and conflict resolution. On the contrary, organizations that encourage their employees to grow and learn usually are serious about conflict resolution. Open communication channels assist upper management to avoid negative reactions by the employees.

Hatch (1997) defined conflict as "an overt struggle between two or more groups in an organization" (p.301). Therefore, communication has an important role in dealing with and solving conflicts that may arise between the employees at different levels to maintain an organization's effectiveness. High levels of cooperation inside an organization assist in reducing and resolving internal problems (Ehling, 1992, p.625; Hatch, 1997, p.300). Plowman (1998) explored how the communication establishes power in organizations. In his study, Plowman outlines how conflict resolution can empower the employees in becoming more effective. The study was based on J.E. Grunig's model of symmetrical two-way practices for communication. Although communication is a method of interaction among employees; it may cause conflict. However, communication may be utilized as an effective way to resolve conflict. The employees should have strong communication activities within and outside the organization to avoid any type of conflict.

The analyzed dynamic changes in communication sounds uttered during induced social interactions between a female and an unfamiliar male. Detailed video graphic and sound analyzes revealed that the arousal state predicted variations in communication sound structure reliably. Both, a decrease of distance and a male approaching the female led to an increase in fundamental frequency and repetition rate of syllables. These findings support comparable results in human and non-human primates and suggest that

common coding rules in communication sounds govern acoustic conflict regulation in mammals (Schehka S, Esser KH, Zimmermann E, 2007). The authors support these statements according to theory bases of study variables.

3.Methodology

3.1.Research Goal

The objective of this study is to empirically investigate the relationship between organizational communication and interpersonal conflict in management institutes located in NCR region.

3.2.Research Design

This study was conducted using a correlational research design. Correlational research represents a general approach to research that focuses on assessing the relationship among variables in a particular sample. The rationale behind choosing this design is to identify the relationship between organizational communication and interpersonal conflict for a given set of subjects.

3.2.1. Sample and Data Collection

The sample for this study consisted of 153 employees of management institutes located in NCR region. Out of 153 employees 137 persons responded. Survey was administered by sending the questionnaires to the selected management institutes. Each employee was assured of the confidentiality of his or her anonymous responses. The questionnaires were self-administered and they were completed inside the institutes. The researcher collected the questionnaires immediately after completion. Descriptive and inferential statistics were performed with SPSS, version 13.0, and Excel.

3.2.2. Instruments

The instrument consists of 32 questions with responses measured on a five point Likert scales, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), assessing communication (the five dimensions such as: freedom of act in communication, efficient inform, formal and informal communication, one-way communication, and open communication channels) and interpersonal conflict (the three dimensions such as: conflict with colleague, conflict with chief, and conflict with subordinate). A demographic questionnaire was developed for this study to obtain information concerning gender, age, education level, kind of employment, and years of service.

3.2.3. Pilot Testing

The main reason for performing a pilot test is to reduce the measurement error and to increase reliability and validity. This technique helps researchers test the questionnaire in order to make sure that the instrument is effective before the main study begins (Frey.et.al). Thirty employees working at different levels in management institutes participated in the pilot test. The pilot data collected from this test were analyzed using factor analysis with computer software package for reliability of the measuring instruments. The reliabilities of the communication sub-dimensions were .91, .87, .85, .88, .93, and for interpersonal conflict sub-dimensions were .95, .93, .92, respectively. The reliability of 8 dimensions was .97 by cronbach's alpha coefficient. Validity was checked by sending the instrument to fifteen university professors via mail to determine if any problems existed with the reading levels or interpretation of the questions. Content validity was confirmed by these experts.

3.3.Data Analysis and Results

The demographic data were obtained from the participants' responses. From 153 participants, working in management institutes based in NCR region; 137 (89.54%) persons completed the survey. Out of 137 participants, 92 (67.15%) were males and 36 (26.28%) were females while 9 (6.57%) did not answer their gender. The current research participants ranged in age from 24 to 58 years old ($M=36.59$, $SD=2.94$). The education levels of current research participants were PG Diploma 64 (46.71%), Master of Commerce 28 (20.44%), Master of Business Administration 27 (19.71%) and PhD 9 (6.57%), with 9 (6.57%) missing data. The current research participants ranged in years of services from 1 to 28 years ($M=18.67$, $SD=2.76$). The kind of employment of current research participants were teachers 103 (75.2%), office staffs 22 (16.1%), research associate 3(2.2%), with 9(6.6%) missing data.

As shown in table 1 the significant proportion of participants evaluate communication in a formal way and pointed out that the communication channels were not open. Also this study found that there is neither freedom of act in communication with upper managers nor efficient information in management institutes was disseminated to the employees. Based on the result of binomial test, interpersonal conflict exists among the employees in management institutes located in NCR region.

Table 1: Result of binomial test of variables

Variables	Category	N	Observed Prop	Test Prop	Asymp Sig
Open communication channels	Agree group	34	0.37	0.50	0.016
	Disagree group	58	0.63		
	Total	92	1.00		
Efficient inform	Agree group	29	0.34	0.50	0.005
	Disagree group	56	0.66		
	Total	85	1.00		
Formal communication	Agree group	35	0.37	0.50	0.013
	Disagree group	60	0.63		
	Total	95	1.00		
Informal communication	Agree group	75	0.68	0.50	0.000
	Disagree group	35	0.32		
	Total	110	1.00		
Freedom of act in communication	Agree group	40	0.38	0.50	0.015
	Disagree group	66	0.62		
	Total	106	1.00		
One-way communication	Agree group	57	0.63	0.50	0.021
	Disagree group	34	0.37		
	Total	91	1.00		
Conflict with chief	Agree group	67	0.6	0.50	0.047
	Disagree group	45	0.4		
	Total	112	1.00		
	Agree group	65	0.67		

Conflict with subordinate	Disagree group	32	0.33	0.50	0.001
	Total	97	1.00		
Conflict with colleague	Agree group	57	0.61	0.50	0.038
	Disagree group	36	0.39		
	Total	93	1.00		
Interpersonal conflict	Agree group	85	0.65	0.50	0.001
	Disagree group	46	0.35		
	Total	131	1.00		

As shown in Table 2 interpersonal conflict affecting by other organizational communication elements, except open communication channels.

Table 2: Result of chi square of variables

Variables	df	Asymp Sig	Chi square value
Organization communication	494	P = 0.000 N = 136	$X^2 = 1184.935^{**}$
Interpersonal conflict			
Freedom of act in communication	39	P = 0.000 N = 137	$X^2 = 249.597^{**}$
Interpersonal conflict			
Open communication channels	39	P = 0.541 N = 136	$X^2 = 37.433$
Interpersonal conflict			
Formal communication	78	P = 0.000 N = 137	$X^2 = 469.351^{**}$
Interpersonal conflict			
Informal communication	117	P = 0.000 N = 137	$X^2 = 184.518^{**}$
Interpersonal conflict			
One-way communication	65	P = 0.000 N = 137	$X^2 = 657.359^{**}$
Interpersonal conflict			
Efficient inform	65	P = 0.000 N = 137	$X^2 = 314.758^{**}$
Interpersonal conflict			

** Difference is significant at the 0.01 level

As shown in Table 3 there is significant relationship between interpersonal conflict and some of organizational communication elements.

Table 3: Result of spearman coefficient between variables

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Correlation coefficient
Interpersonal conflict	2.6502	0.62971	2	4.33	r= 0.608** P= 0.000 N= 136
Organizational ommunication	2.2510	0.22435	1.81	2.89	
Interpersonal conflict	2.6502	0.62971	2	4.33	r= -0.005 P= 0.955 N= 137
Freedom of act in communication	2.3064	0.27617	1.33	3	
Interpersonal conflict	2.6502	0.62971	2	4.33	r= 0.519* P= 0.000 N= 137
Formal communication	2.4854	0.63214	2	4	
Interpersonal conflict	2.6502	0.62971	2	4.33	r= -0.243** P= 0.004 N= 137
Informal communication	1.7245	0.57305	1	4	
Interpersonal conflict	2.6502	0.62971	2	4.33	r= 0.805** P= 0.000 N= 137
One-way communication	2.5731	0.64721	2	4.33	
Interpersonal conflict	2.6502	0.62971	2	4.33	r= -0.181* P= 0.035 N= 137
Efficient inform	2.1332	0.26089	1.75	3	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

In Tables 4 & 5 the calculated P value shows there is no significant differences between organizational communication, interpersonal conflict and demographic aspects such as employee's age, employee's records of service, employee's education levels, employee's type of employment and employee's gender.

Table 4: Result of Kruskal-Wallis test of variables (N=128)

Variables	Kruskal-Wallis value
Employees' s age	H = 0.270 ; Asymp.Sig = 0.965 ; df = 3
Interpersonal conflict	
Employees' s age	H = 1.95 ; Asymp.Sig = 0.583 ; df = 3
Organizational communication	
Employees' s records of service	H = 4.022 ; Asymp.Sig = 0.546 ; df = 5
Interpersonal cnflict	
Employees' s records of service	H = 4.776 ; Asymp.Sig = 0.444 ; df = 5
Organizational communication	
Employees' s education levels	H = 3.283 ; Asymp.Sig = 0.35 ; df = 3
Interpersonal conflict	

Employees' s education levels	H = 0.683 ; Asymp.Sig = 0.877 ; df = 3
Organizational communication	
Employees' s type of employment	H = 0.545 ; Asymp.Sig = 0.762 ; df = 2
Interpersonal conflict	
Employees' s type of employment	H = 0.38 ; Asymp.Sig = 0.827 ; df = 2
Organizational communication	

Table 5: Result of Mann-Whitney U test of variables

Variables		N	Mean Rank	U value
Employees' s Gender	Male	92	67.1	U = 1417 Asymp.Sig= 0.198 N=128
	Female	36	57.86	
Interpersonal Conflict				
Employees' s Gender	Male	92	68.09	U = 1325.5 Asymp.Sig= 0.08 N=128
	Female	36	55.32	
Organizational communication				

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The broad purpose of the study is to identify the effect of organizational communications system on the conflict among the employees in management institutes based in NCR region. The study results were based on 137 questionnaires completed by employees. The instrument used in this study examined the organizational communications system with five dimensions (freedom of act in communication, efficient inform, formal and informal communication, one-way communication, and open communication channels) and interpersonal conflict with three dimensions (conflict with colleague, conflict with chief, and conflict with subordinate). Identifying what is the dominant organizational communications system in NCR region based management institutes was the main focus of this study. The study also examined how interpersonal conflict is affected by organizational communications system.

This research confirmed finding regarding the negative impact of conflict on the working communications, particularly on employees. Previous studies conducted by Hatch 1997; and Plowman 1998 claimed the importance of communication within organizations and employees to reduce conflict. The results confirmed that communication was the key factor with an issue becoming an interpersonal conflict. This was supported by a study conducted by Schehka S, Esser KH, Zimmermann E (2007) who believed that communication with detail such as sound may cause conflict. The high percentage of interpersonal conflict could indicate that these three types of interpersonal conflict occurred because of a lack of proper organizational communications system. The explanation as to why this type of conflict occurs is that when an organization does not take a proactive approach to certain issues they usually developed into an interpersonal conflict. Banks (2000) claimed that being proactive and giving proper

attention to the surrounding environment as an approach to managing issues, is a preventive means before a conflict occurs. This is especially true when the relationship between employees in an organization is not based on strong communication. Lack of communication and information within an organization may lead to increased levels of uncertainty among employees. Results showed that there was a lack of proper communication between employees and upper management, and between the superior and subordinate in general. Most employees express that there are neither freedom of act in communication with upper managers nor efficient inform in their offices, whereas the finding of the most of the previous researchers just reported the communication with employees should be ongoing and consistent and High levels of cooperation inside an organization assist in reducing and resolving internal problems (Dawson, 2003; Ehling, 1992). Certainly, employees are suffering from the lack of freedom of act in communication with upper managers to express their need and their concerns. Neglecting employees' needs could lead to conflict. Organizational communications system recommends the use of freedom of act in communicate with upper managers as an effective communication strategy and as a mean of dealing with an interpersonal conflict. The data indicate that there aren't significant differences on interpersonal conflict affecting by age, gender, education and record of service. The most of participants evaluate communication in the image of informal and refused the communication channels are open. This study also found that present participants didn't agree with one-way organizational communication in their offices, whereas the finding of some researchers indicated the major way to resolve any conflict is the establishing open channels of communication; and communication may cause conflict (Clove and Goldsmith, 2000; Grunig, J.E., 1992). Therefore, having open channels of communication could be a solution for reducing interpersonal conflict. The authors of this study believe that communication is the required method, which enables organizations to decrease the level of interpersonal conflict through activating the role of organizational communications system. Not using open communication channels at a time of interpersonal conflict may vitiate the learning environment of the institute.

The results of the responses to this question revealed that interpersonal conflict exists in management institutes in NCR region. Furthermore, the researcher identified that interpersonal conflict in management institutes did differ according to the type of interpersonal conflict they faced (see Table 1). Communication strategies, such as opens communication channels, freedom of act in communication, efficient inform, and multiple communications are the major ways, of responding to an interpersonal conflict. This supports the idea of the contingency theory that the organization should be flexible in dealing with any event; since there is no one right way to confront an interpersonal conflict. Applying the appropriate and strong communication helps the organization to: (1) identify the cause of a problem through feedback, (2) increase organizational stability, (3) and keep interpersonal conflict controllable. Therefore, according to these factors an organization will be able to design an appropriate response strategy. It seems the need for an organization to place high priority on reducing all types of interpersonal conflict with their employees because they are the real power and resource for the organization. There is an obvious need to begin thinking about interpersonal conflict management. Issue management should be one of the major areas that organizations should focus on because it is the first stage that helps organizations to detect the possibility of an interpersonal conflict. Departments need to focus on having a written strategy for dealing with important communication and practices in an interpersonal conflict. Academic researchers also need to conduct research to evaluate not only interpersonal conflict but other aspects of communication especially in the field of message construction and dissemination. Future studies could be geared towards establishing comparisons between organizational communications system for interpersonal conflict in education sectors in different geographic locations.

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