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Objectives

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Leadership and Negotiation Skills

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Abstract

Lateralized and complex organizational structures increase the potential for emergence of conflict situations. In this context, in which the relations of authority are rendered down, the qualities traditionally associated with leadership effectiveness, such as vision, self-confidence or charisma, may be insufficient. Managing conflicts about objectives and strategies as well as negotiating the allocation of scarce resources constitute conditions for effective leadership in today's organizations.

1 | Conflict: A Fact of Organizational Life

Conflict is salient part of organizational life. Today, it is virtually ubiquitous and assumes different forms. Strikes, , grievances and disputes including those which are accompanied by court proceedings, are explicit manifestations of conflict. Less visible, altercations between colleagues, which result in difficulties in working together and mutual hostility, or even oppositional behavior to a directive from management, are examples that show other facets of the conflict in organizations.

Although the conflict has always been associated with interactions within any human group, and hence organizations, recent decades have brought changes that greatly increased the potential for organizational conflict. The increasing diversity of the workforce, for example, has radically altered the demographic landscape of organizations and it challenges managers to deal with problems of ethnic, gender or age discrimination. Even if there is a reasonable consensus on the need to find ways to take advantage of diverse talents for economic advantage, some reflections of diversity, particularly the ones which rely on differences in social status, can cause conflict and disruption.

In organizations, as in almost every domain of life, there are frequent cases of antagonism between individuals or groups due to clash of ideas and interests, arising from divergent aspirations and goals. In many conflicts, this divergence is objectively false, relying on biased perceptions, which drive people to defend ideas, beliefs or opinions, they take erroneously as incompatible with other people's ideas. However, the observation of activities in organizations indicates that people have a multiplicity of individual or group objectives and interests. So, an important part of conflict situations has a realistic basis: the protagonists differ, in fact, because they compete, explicitly or tacitly, for scarce resources such as money, space, time and information.

Since the first theoretical approaches to management, there is a clear recognition of the salience of conflicts of interest between individuals and groups in organizations and, more specifically, between employers and employees. However, in line with the Taylorist tradition, what lays behind this perspective is the idea that the presence of conflict was is was due to mistakes of employees, i.e., in "deviant", "anti-social" or "dysfunctional" behaviors (Ackroyd, 2008). In practical terms, the conflict was referred as a multifaceted phenomenon generically defined and associated with events such as complaints about work, sabotage of production and also included individual expressions of conflict such as turnover, absenteeism and problems with discipline.

When not in accordance with the expectations of the employer, the conflict is seen as negative. This view is typical of a Unitarian approach still advocated by some managers today rests on the idea that the organization and its members have a common goal and, therefore, all employees benefit from the successes that the organization can achieve. Consequently, there is an emphasis on the importance of achieving and maintaining harmonious relationships, and the occurrence of conflict is seen defensively as the result of misunderstandings, rather than being conceived as a natural product of the confrontation of different interests. And therefore, it is up to management to communicate and persuade people in the most effectively as possible to stop it. This "Unitarian" perspective is silent about the existence of a conflict of interest between the social actors in organization, and assumes that to the extent management "best practices" are followed, conflict is not perceived as necessary or as inevitable.

Instead, an alternative approach, which we designate "pluralistic", emphasizes that organizations integrate diverse groups, which seek to legitimately express their own points of view which are partially divergent. The resultant conflict is inevitable and the mission of managers in this domain is to establish a series of frameworks and procedures to address the conflict in an institutional manner. It is about creating ways to mitigate the costs of conflict through negotiation procedures to be used in a number of situations in predictable disagreement (e, g., Ury, Brett & Goldberg, 1988). In summary, within a pluralist framework, the manager's role is to balance the various interests, for the achievement of strategic goals of the organization.

Those two perspectives correspond to different practices and labels. Thus, the designation "conflict resolution", most commonly used by those who have a Unitarian perspective, is associated with a negative view of the conflict as a threat to the stability of organizations, and thus points to interventions that seek the reduction or elimination of conflicts, using processes such as mediation, arbitration or formal negotiation (Rahim, 2002). By contrast, the "conflict management" aims to reduce the dysfunctional impacts and simultaneously seeks to expand the constructive functions of conflict, harnessing the innovative potential contained in the discussion of divergences. In organizations where this perspective is dominant, the solutions to conflicts are found through the use of collaborative learning and integrating the diverse viewpoints of the parties involved.

Tacitly, the Unitarian perspective remains, even today, a dominant belief in management practices and academic considerations: "An organization will not operate effectively unless it has a stable and relatively harmonious relationship with its employees. Conflict and disaffection will lead, almost inevitably, to high staff turnover, poor attendance, lack of involvement and other indicators of poor performance." (Stredwick, 2005, p.242).

The concern of achieving a balance between control of the negative consequences of the conflict and the use of their potentialities is broadly supported by research (e.g., Rahim & Bonoma, 1979), suggesting that it is worth encouraging the conflict when he is absent and moderate its occurrence when this is excessive.

In general, two guidelines on how to deal with labor disputes can be highlighted. On the one hand, we find a classic vision of the "labor relations", whose premises hold that the conflict results from an imbalance of power employer-employee, it is durable, and requires often institutional interventions, from unions and employers, to fix the power imbalance. Firmly rooted in typical assumptions of School of Human Relations of the 30s and 40s of last century, an alternative approach considers that the occurrence and, especially, the persistence of conflict stems from mismanagement. Any antagonism can be partially reduced by organizational innovations (redesign of the job, for example) that contribute to reconcile the interests of employers and employees. Accordingly, the claims and complaints of workers are seen as a positive "voice" mechanism (Hirschman, 1970), i.e., a way of reporting any inadequacies and injustices. Therefore, this approach seeks to address proactively the underlying conflict through the use of problem solving techniques, and fostering cooperative guidelines aimed at achieving mutual benefits for the parties involved.

Through informal discussions between supervisors and employees or formally, such as committees and forums, for example, this approach prescribes intervention at an early stage of conflict. As underlined by Lewin (2008), it is a dynamic form of anticipation and monitoring of conflict in contrast to other approaches that emphasize the deterioration of the employment relationship as a pretext to search for reactive organizational justice with the aim of resolving disputes, which meanwhile hatched.

2 | Leadership and Negotiation

Ubiquity of conflict in organizations, as a result of factors mentioned above, such as the demographic changes and the increasing structural complexity in organizations, is also encouraged by the dominant paradigm in management these days. Thus, the occurrence of conflicts is more likely due to continual pressures to change, adapt and innovate, with the concomitant increase in workload and job insecurity.

Given that the high potential for conflict is one of the defining characteristics of organizations currently, no manager can ignore the need to develop skills and designing action plans to deal positively with the confrontation of differences. However, this centrality of conflict management appears to differ from the tendency to exacerbate the traditional dimensions of leadership: vision charisma or self-confidence, for example. However, leading without formal authority is nowadays common and necessary. And this involves using skills to manage conflict and negotiate. The importance of these competences has increased in recent times because the world has never been so complex and the interdependency so strong. Nations, social groups, organizations and individuals are bound by ties more or less visible.

The need to respond to the complexity of the surrounding context led an equal complexity in organizational structures. On the other hand, the intensive use of new information technologies, creating a tacit requirement of omnipresence and prompt response, also encourages friction between individuals and groups. But perhaps the key factor to increase the conflict is the decline of the traditional hierarchy that simultaneously led to a more "flat" structures but also more complex, which started to demand a permanent negotiation of resources and have created conditions for more frequent confrontations of opposed goals, beliefs and values. Moreover, all these conditions reinforce the relations of interdependency on goals and decisions. And it is known that the more people depend on each other the greater the likelihood of conflict (Deutsch, 1973, 2000).

Exercising leadership effectively implies understanding the interests of each follower and to recognize that the emergence of differences about it may lead to conflict, with which it is necessary to handle constructively. Cooperate is one of those ways. The exercise of transformational leadership, for example, involves mediation and conflict management as mechanisms through which the leader improves team coordination, and therefore contributes to better team performance (Zhang, & Tjosvold, 2011). However, some aversion to transactional contacts (i.e., involving exchanges and rewards) with the followers, by giving almost total emphasis on construction of rapport, can result in a tendency to use a

compromising style (Hendel, Fish, & Galon, 2005), abdicating the discovery of more creative solutions and that go beyond the "lose-lose" situation associated with compromise solutions. This tendency is in line with results of classical studies (Fry, Firestone, & Williams, 1983) which show that a strong emotional attachment between parties can lead to solutions "half bridge" to avoid damaging the relationship.

The specific requirements of project management are perhaps one of the best examples of how leadership involves intensive negotiation skills. Project teams have gained increasing salience in the functioning many companies, coexisting in a matrix form with functional departments. The leader of a project team manages scarce resources: time of its members, who come from various departments, but also, for example, money and space allocated to it. This type of management occurs in a context in which the structural units seek to assert their interests through the members they "lend" to the team. Managing project teams involves almost continuous allocation of resources that are under the control of others. In turn, the result of the team work globally favors the acquisition of resources for the departments involved and for the company as a whole.

In short, interdependency permeates all external and internal relationships in a project team. But, in general, the prevalence of teams and workgroups in organizations today reinforces those ties, requiring constant attention to the leaders to confront problems and explore solutions to conflicts that necessarily derive from this interdependence.

3 | Intervention in Interpersonal Conflicts

At interpersonal level, even though the conflict may be related to individual characteristics, such as the predisposition to dogmatism, the level of propensity to pleasantness in relationships and other the characteristics of the situation in which they occur are crucial. This means that situational factors and personality predispositions determine both the emergence of conflicts between people and how they are addressed.

In conflicts between individuals, it is difficult to extract people from organizational settings in which they occur. Some of the situational variables are, moreover, formatted for the actions of those who are in charge hierarchically or functionally. The exercise of leadership affects, for example, the clarity or ambiguity of occupational role, the degree of autonomy, etc.. For example, two colleagues who are in conflict because of the vacation planning are not doing it just because of individual differences in interests and personality. The leadership style of the manager responsible for the work of both may be decisive in how conflict evolves. For instance, the leader may be more or less strict in applying the rules of planning, or more or less conducive to dialogue about personal matters of workers, thus determining the process and outcome of the conflict situation.

By recognizing the importance of conflict settlement on productivity and on employee motivation, the exercise of leadership includes active interventions in various conflict situations that also require different strategies for action. In interpersonal conflicts, the way situation is perceived determines how the process takes place, beyond structural or contextual factors. Five individual strategies of conflict management have been identified in literature (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Thomas, 1976; Bonoma & Rahim, 1979; Pruitt, 1983), integrating a descriptive model that also contains prescriptive guidance for organizational daily life.

Competition - also called confrontation or domination, it refers to a situation in which one party continually tries to persuade the other to yield and it may include threats and intimidation. This strategy may be appropriate when quick decisions are demanded and there's not enough time to discuss the differences. However, will inevitably produce "winners" and "losers", it generates malaise and encourages desires for revenge. When both parties are equally powerful there is high probability of rupture or increased hostility.

Avoidance - is an active way of doing nothing to the conflict, paradoxically. It may be an appropriate strategy when, for example, the issue is trivial or if it is desirable to "cool down" a complicated conflict before it can be approached in a more constructive way. However, it may be ineffective if used in situations that require an immediate solution and binding for

both parties. On the other hand, it tends to enhance future disruptions as its use deny, in fact, the existence of the problem that led to the situation. So if there is no active resolution, the return of conflict is inevitable. That is, the mechanisms of avoidance can be a very effective way to deal with a conflict situation in the short run. However, if it lasts too long, this strategy may be dysfunctional because it prevents the recognition that a problem exists.

Problem solving - Using this strategy, also called integration or cooperation, the individual seeks to satisfy both the personal interests and those of others. This approach enables the identification of areas of agreement and disagreement, and selecting of a solution to the problem that can incorporate the perspectives of both parties. By envisioning the disagreement as a problem to be solved jointly, so that each party can benefit from the solution, the cooperation strategy is, however, the one that requires more time to settle the conflict. Hence it may be contraindicated or difficult to implement when there is short time available to reach a solution. This strategy is convenient when problems are complex and a synthesis of proposals from both parties may favor the quality of the solution. Therefore, it is considered the most appropriate way to address disputes involving organizational goals, strategic guidelines or long-term planning (Rhaim, 2002).

Accommodation - also called "yielding" or "submission", this strategy, which implies some subordination of self-interest and the acceptance of others' interests, proves to be appropriate for dealing with situations in which conflict resolution is more important to one of the parties and the need or desire to preserve personal relationship prevails. It can also be a way to get "social credit", giving up something unimportant, tacitly expecting to get something in return in the future. Instead, the style is inappropriate when the issue is important to the individual, or when the other party defends ethically reprehensible positions.

Compromising - this may be an appropriate strategy when the parties are at impasse in resolving a conflict or need a temporary solution. In practice, It consists in exchanging concessions (fifty / fifty). This is what happens, for example, when the objectives of both parties are mutually exclusive. It is an inadequate way to address conflicts associated with complex problems, which, more than a means to momentarily solve the conflict, require rational efforts to find solutions to enable qualitative gains for both parties.

Strategies for the management of conflict are therefore answers to specific situations. But one cannot say that the influence of the environment on the individual is univocal. In fact, the individual styles of conflict management may, in turn, shape the social environment of those who make use of them, affecting the level of conflict and therefore the stress associated with it. Using data collected from workers of a hospital service, Friedman, Tidd, Currall and Tsai. (2000) have shown that those who use a more collaborative strategy have lower levels of conflict and stress in their teams. Those who choose strategies of domination or avoidance

get more involved in conflicts, presenting therefore a higher stress level. Put it another way, when it comes to conflict, the work environment is also a product of the actions of people themselves. Thus, the rigidity of the leader in the approach to intra-organizational, tacit or explicit negotiations format, and conflict management may constitute a potential threat to the overall effectiveness of the exercise of leadership. In order to be effective, the choice of strategy should be contingent upon the characteristics of the situation such as, for example, the level of complexity and importance of the issue in dispute, the urgency of the solution or the power relationship between parties. This means that the leader effectiveness when acting on a conflict situation lies on the choice of strategy, whether she/he manages to escape from the automatic tendency to use her/his personal style impulsively, i.e., when she/he acts in a flexible way.

4| Leadership and Conflict in Work Groups

As mentioned before, it is still prevalent the belief that intergroup conflict in the organization (between different groups of employees or between departments, for example) is dysfunctional. In the opposite direction, but equally stereotypical, remains the vision of intragroup conflict as necessarily functional process (Behfar & Thompson, 2007). However, as stated by Thompson (2003, p.156), "conflict is lot like cholesterol: There is a good kind and a bad kind". Research findings in this area suggest that conflict within work groups and teams may assume healthy and useful ways, but it can also prove burdensome, destructive, and harmful to the accomplishment of group's work. The advantage of the team over the individual, which lies in its diversity of resources, knowledge and ideas, is simultaneously the condition of the potential for conflict. This means that the richness of interaction within the team is due to the confrontation of different sources of knowledge, which unavoidably generate conflict. This conflict is positive in general, since it is a cognitive conflict, i.e., a discussion of ideas, and its results could be the basis for creating new and more creative solutions. Specifically, a moderate level of conflict is functional, as it stimulates discussion and debate, improving group performance through a better understanding of various points of view and alternative solutions (Jehn, 1995). However, as there are other differences that fuel conflict, such as those relating to values and attitudes, outcomes are not always positive.

A classic taxonomy of interpersonal conflicts (Guetzkow & Gyr, 1954) it is useful to clarify the nature of the consequences of intragroup divergence. Thus, it is possible to distinguish, first, the affective conflicts, which concern antagonisms related to personal issues, involving negative emotions and exacerbated tension between people. A group where there are serious frictions and quarrels among its members is naturally prone to affective conflicts at work. A second category refers to the cognitive conflict, i.e., referring to a situation in which there is exchange of ideas about the work that is being done in the group. If people disagree about what they have to do, they will be faced with a task conflict. If, despite agreeing on what to do, they are in antagonism about how to achieve it, a process conflict is likely to occur. In general, it is assumed that cognitive conflicts tend to generate positive outcomes for the group and the organization. Rather, affective conflicts negatively influence the performance as the hostility between people's cognitive function deteriorates and limits the concentration of attention in tasks. The medium and long run, it reduces the level of member satisfaction and their desire to work together.

Conflict can be boosted by the existence of differences in power, leadership style (De Dreu & Van Kleef, 2004) and heterogeneity in group composition (e.g., Jehn, Chadwick &

Thatcher, 1997), creating a tendency for relational confrontations. Another conflict source that is specific of teams is the reward system of group performance. Rewarding the goal achievement of team as a whole (rather than individual performance) it is advisable in order to reinforce the interdependency and increase the effort of the team members. However, this process introduces the propensity to discuss justice issues by questioning the differences in individual contributions to the collective effort. It is a kind of conflict can be particularly severe when the specific team members get individualized rewards. This problem is often experienced in organizations that in the past have rewarded individual performance and, at some point began to reward the whole team effort. But, however hard that these confrontations are, and depending on the interaction and communication patterns adopted by the group, especially those relating to the negotiation of solutions, the consequences could be positive and functional, such as innovation, improved performance and member satisfaction. Conversely, conflict may turn into dysfunctional interaction, involving aggression and hostility, and resulting in loss of performance.

No work group is immune to relational conflicts, no matter how good the climate of interaction among its members. Moreover, there is often a co-occurrence of cognitive and affective conflicts, so it is difficult to demonstrate that the cognitive conflict by itself, results in higher performance (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). In practice, more than the propensity for either type of conflict, what characterizes an effective work group is the ability to transform the affective conflict in a confrontation of ideas (cognitive conflict) that, in most cases, underlies it. And this ability depends on different individual and group variables (Tjosvold, 2008). Certain characteristics of groups, such as a high level of confidence or the deliberate adoption of standardized procedures for dealing with internal difficulties, help to establish a boundary between the affective and cognitive conflict, while maintaining a desirable level of controversy to promote more creative decisions (cf. review of Behfar & Thompson, 2007). On the other hand, since teams and workgroups evolve over time, the way the members will initially resolving conflicts and how they learn to integrate differences between members determine how they handle conflicts as they arise and in particular, the way they manage its functional effects.

To sum up, knowing the desirable and undesirable types of conflict in workgroups and teams it is possible to intervene consequences in structural way (eg, creation of standards) and relational (eg, building confidence) to maximize the benefits of discussing the divergences.

5| Communication is Key, Cooperation is not

Enough

It is common to prescribe cooperation as accurate panacea for conflict management. Indeed, a clear personal orientation to assign importance to the interests of others (high social motivation) is a necessary but not sufficient condition to deal constructively with conflict situations with a certain degree of complexity. The effectiveness of the performance is maximized when, in addition to behave in prosocial ways, people have high epistemic motivation (De Dreu, Koole & Steinel, 2000; Simões, 2011), i.e., when they are motivated to analyze the causes of conflicts, appreciate different perspectives and create solution proposals. Some variables can help individuals to focus on facts and deepen the analysis of their differences, reducing or reversing the propensity for escalating conflict. De Dreu (2005) suggests that issues such as the balance of power, accountability, and time availability are crucial. Because it promotes epistemic motivation (i.e., the desire to think thoroughly about the decisive aspects of the conflict) the aggregation of these variables can turn socially motivated individuals, but who tend not to reflect on the causes of conflict (and therefore have difficulty finding constructive solutions) in pro-social thinkers who strive to resolve their disputes in order to obtain mutual benefits.

Frequently, the misuse (or lack of) personal communication skills are seen as factor that potentiates the conflict between individuals. In fact, communication skills, such as active listening and appropriate use of feedback, are essential to reduce distortions of meaning and information gaps in which the process of interpersonal communication is fertile. And, of course, are useful for dealing with conflict situations. The effective resolution of interpersonal conflict always involves an effort by both parties to put themselves in the other's perspective as well as the ability to lead the other party to do the same. When they arrived on this stage, using forms of active listening, opponents have managed something central to building a mutually acceptable solution: agree to disagree. That is, they have expressed a sincere desire to understand the position and interests of the other person, overcoming the common confusion between "understanding" and "agreeing". Becoming aware of differences and being able to analyze them is an essential step to accept that a difference is only a difference, not right or wrong. This process, in turn, takes some form of cognitive restructuring, i.e., a *sensemaking* process that changes the meaning of the conflict situation,

which is now different from the perspective that each party held before starting the discussion of their differences.

Being able to transform the opposition of interests and / or ideas into a problem to be solved in common not only depend on the proper use of individual communication skills. This ability is based on a constructive view of the conflict and calls for values of cooperation and understanding between people. However, even if the effectiveness of communication between people is not a panacea for conflict resolution, as commonly believed, the truth is that without the proper use of communication, good intentions are not enough. Communicating effectively helps individuals in conflict to explore the views of both parties and to change accusations into feelings, guilt into causes, "truths" into perceptions.

Ultimately, the appropriate management of communication can support the exercise of leadership, disentangling the problems that led to conflict from selfish resonances of the situation. And this is a crucial step to avoid biased and useless attributions of intention and an indispensable condition for building a constructive solution for the conflict.

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