

# A Study on Stress Factors Influencing Conflict Management

\*K.Tirumalaiah, \* \* V.Sreecharan\* \* \*W.R.Sony,

Associate Professor, Rayalaseema Institute of Information and Management Sciences, Tirupati.

Email: [tirumalaiah\\_k2002@yahoo.co.in](mailto:tirumalaiah_k2002@yahoo.co.in)

Associate Professor, Rayalaseema Institute of Information and Management Sciences, Tirupati.

Email: [sreecharanvem@gmail.com](mailto:sreecharanvem@gmail.com)

Assistant Professor, Rayalaseema Institute of Information and Management Sciences, Tirupati.

Email: [sonymba@gmail.com](mailto:sonymba@gmail.com)

## Abstract:

*Mental and physical health determines the individual's life quality, productivity, work performance and activity. In addition, it also has a strong impact on the effectiveness and fruitfulness of the functions the individual has in his or her closer or wider environment and also influences his or her public and social activities. Based on this fact we can assert that the existence of programmes that maintain and support the health of the individuals – in other words the members of society – is a major social priority. The present study has collected responses from a convenience sample of 72 employees working in manufacturing units under different hierarchies through questionnaire method. The findings of the study are worth noting. The study found that the effectiveness of individual in conflict management aiming to preserve mental health is in close correlation with biological health protection and the optimal operation in dissolving conflicts, in which conflict manager has a major role.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

**Conflict management** is the process of limiting the negative aspects of conflict while increasing the positive aspects of conflict. 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. Since relationship conflicts are inevitable, learning to deal with them in the minimum 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 you need for successful conflict resolution, you can keep

your personal and professional relationships strong and growing.

In 2006–07 the number of individual employment disputes that resulted in employment tribunal applications increased to 132,577 compared with 115,039 for the previous year as per managing conflict at work, a guide for line managers by CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development). Conflict arises from differences of individuals, perception and self-esteem. It occurs whenever people disagree over their values, motivations, perceptions, ideas, or desires. Sometimes these differences look trivial, but when a conflict triggers strong feelings, a deep personal and relational need is at the core of the

problem—a need to feel safe and secure, a need to feel respected and valued, or a need for greater closeness and intimacy.

### **Types of Conflict**

The processes of resolving conflict are influenced to a great degree by the situations in which the conflict occurs, for example, within the context of the organization. Three types of possible conflict in an organization are intrapersonal, interpersonal, and intergroup.

***Intrapersonal Conflict:*** An experience that takes place within an individual. It occurs in relation to temptations to stop dieting as well as in a major decision of getting into better physical shape to get a good evaluation report.

An individual experiencing guilt as a result of inner conflicts often becomes depressed, irritable, and restless. However, identifying the actual source of the conflict and distinguishing between what one wish to do and what should be done are two steps in managing inner conflict successfully. Wishing leads to day dreaming and continued conflict, while authentic wanting leads directly to a specific behavior. Thus, when there is a follow through behavior, an individual feels stronger and more confident; he has risen to a personal challenge and brought about positive personal change.

***Interpersonal Conflict:*** Conflict between individuals in the same organization. It exists whenever people interact in some way to produce results or achieve goals. Because they differ, however, in many ways; attitude, personality, values, goals, background, experience etc. the resultant conflict makes the attainment of the goals quite difficult. Therefore, learning to make

the proper adjustments is an important factor in managing interpersonal conflict.

***Intergroup Conflict:*** conflict between groups within the organization. It occurs whenever there is a contact or interaction between the groups. Three sources of intergroup conflict are: Cohesion—“Sticking together” within a group often causes out-group hostility; structure type of leadership and status of individuals within a group are factors that increase conflict; power taking actions which affect others and purposely influencing the welfare of others produce conflict with less powerful groups. Parties involved in conflict, by trying to find solutions acceptable to all, can reduce by dysfunctional aspects of conflict.

### **Reasons for Organizational Conflict**

- i. Competition for scarce resources
- ii. Inherent conflict
- iii. Line-Staff Relationships
- iv. Difference in goals and values
- v. Organizational ambiguities

### **Role of Stress in Conflict Management**

While some workplace stress is normal, excessive stress can interfere with your productivity and impact your physical and emotional health. And your ability to deal with it can mean the difference between success and failure. One can't control everything in your work environment, but that doesn't mean you're powerless or couldn't control stress for the conflict you meant with, even when you're stuck in a difficult situation. The stress levels differ based on the situation and type of conflict managed by the conflict manager or supervisor. The role of stress is aside from the normal in case

of conflict management. Finding ways to manage workplace stress isn't about making huge changes or rethinking career ambitions, but rather about focusing on the one thing that's always within your control by balancing stress levels. Although counseling and mentoring guides the employees in right way, somewhat effective training is also important to avoid conflicts.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Corbitt Clark & Mary (2005) defined job stress as "the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker." The author adds that the overwhelming effect of stress on workers can be devastating. Not only is high stress unhealthy, as documented in the article, but it costs employers billions of dollars each year in areas such as burnout, turnover, lack of production and absenteeism. The author's points out that many companies are aware of the effects of stress, and are taking steps to prevent this occurrence. The first step, as she points out, is for the organization to meet with and talk to their people, in an effort to determine the areas of greatest concern. After this is done, companies must follow up frequently to see that any interventions implemented are being carried out.

Blake and Mouton (1964) were among the first to present a conceptual scheme for classifying the modes (styles) for handling interpersonal conflicts in five types: forcing, withdrawing, smoothing, compromising, and problem solving.

Neges, G. and Neges, R. (1998) defined ten steps of conflict management. These are as follows:

- i. Recognition (realization and awareness of the conflict);
- ii. Localization (discovering the situation, defining the parties involved);
- iii. Definition of the conflict situation (the reason of the conflict, finding out the extent the parties are involved);
- iv. Decision about the negotiation of conflict (in the case of a third party: initiation, including evaluation, the clarification of satisfaction, bringing up the situation, feedback, preparation of decision about conflict resolution; in the case of an involved party the decision whether he or she intends to participate in problem resolution);
- v. Acknowledgement of conflict by both parties (mutual confession, clarifying the way of solution);
- vi. Internal or external resolution (the parties decide whether they involve external aid Or manage the conflict themselves);
- vii. Straightforward announcement of needs (bringing up the conflict and talking about it Openly);
- viii. Clarification of emotions (open acceptance and coordination of emotions),
- ix. Negotiation (clarifying the steps of resolution, agreement on the method of problem Resolution);
- x. The principle of insurance (prevention of further problems, profit of both parties, Alternative: further discussions)

Nowack (1987) argued that Self-perception separates individuals based on their

self-esteem as the moderating element for responding to stressors. He conducted a study to validate this division and found that, activeness did not have a significant effect on the effectiveness of conflict resolution, but the agreeableness of the conflict management style, has a positive impact on how groups felt about the way the conflict was managed, regardless of the outcome.

Rahim (2002) noted that there is agreement among management scholars that there is no one best approach to make decisions, lead or manage conflict. Similarly, rather creating a very specific model of conflict management, Rahim created a meta-model for conflict styles based on two dimensions, concern for self and concern for others.

Chung, B. G., & Schneider, B. (2002) focus on employees' role conflicts when it comes to a point where they need to make a decision while they're serving for both customers and their companies. The study proposed a framework for understanding possible outcomes of conflict that employees might face at work. It also puts evidences for where conflict might arise when employees think what customers expect from them vs. how management rewards employees.

DeBel, J. C. (2003) discussed the workplace aggression in health care industry, in which nurses are exposed to different kinds of aggression, both verbal and physical. The article gives statistics about the negative effects of workplace aggression over the health care staff. It is concluded that the management needs to take preventive measures through legal policies and

strict training. The article recommends different methods to overcome conflict and stress (meditation, counseling etc.) on how to deal with workplace aggression such as stress management sessions and patient family/staff meetings.

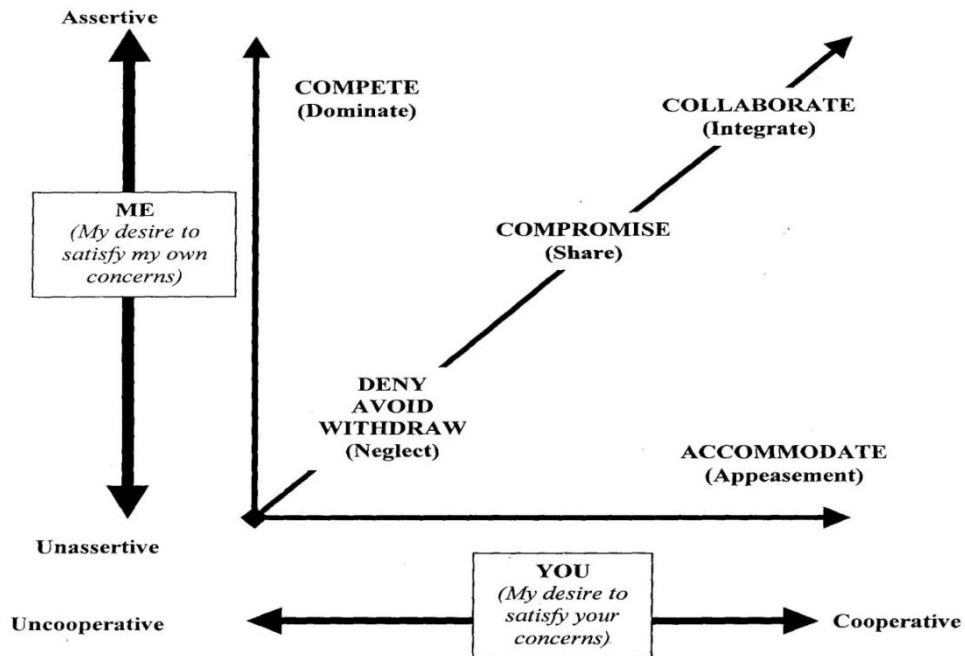
Bronson, (2004) provides a thesis that highlights the effects of role-conflict on active duty personnel and the relationship of the effects of conflict with burnout. Captain Bronson suggests that after deployment the certain high-stress events caused higher levels of burnout and conflict that prior to deployment. Bronson discusses the implications of the findings.

Joyce, A. (2004) discussed ways conflict can be avoided in the workplace by one worker making a simple adjustment. Joyce demonstrates the value of conversation in the conflict resolution process by pointing to specific examples. She also shows through McCrea's (Conflict Resolution Guide, Counselor) encounters that many people will suffer through conflicts because they are fearful of conflict situations. McCrea believes that dealing with conflict immediately can solve many of the problems in the workplace, making for a more productive workplace.

McClure, L. (2000) in his book titled "Anger and conflict in the work place" provided ways to help in determining if someone is having a bad day or if there is a greater concern to be worried about. It also talks about how to create an environment that is less stressful. It provides insight on how to identify crisis situations, conflict and emotions of anger before spiraling into violence.

**Fig 1: Dealing with Stress**

*(This model depicts how I deal with conflict between myself & others)*



*(Source: Thomas, 1976)*

### 3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- i. To assess the type of conflict influencing stress on conflict manager.
- ii. To examine the source of conflict influencing employees stress in the organization.
- iii. To know whether conflicts are influenced by management practices, gender and culture bias.

### 4. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study covers three aspects: (a) type of conflict between employees (Managers and Supervisors) in respect of their values, approaches, and considerations (b) Sources of conflicts; organizational practices to ensure respondents coordination, skills and awareness

towards conflict management strategies for sustaining an effective organizational culture. (c) Stress level of managers and supervisors in resolving conflicts in organization.

### 5. NEED FOR THE STUDY AND EXPECTED CONTRIBUTION

It is said that the next global frontier for India in corporate is encouraging constructive conflicts at workplace. Since conflicts are important for organizations and managers today to adapt and to bring change, the study is not only relevant but also significant. In view of the ongoing debate on how conflicts can be considered and managed as an important characteristic of an organization and how this conflicts show its impact as stress, a study of attitudes of executives/supervisors is

considered relevant because mostly the conflicts are resolved with the help of supervisors/executives. With this study, we can also study the stress levels of them. Attitudes of executives/supervisors are important for managing conflicts that represent the constructive or destructive elements for a business organization, as they play a significant role in this aspect.

The present study is expected to contribute to the theoretical base on approach to conflicts in organizations on one hand and impact of stress in resolving conflict. The study may stimulate and provide an insight into the approaches required by the management to the respondents and readers to think about conflicts and introspect their ways of dealing with it at workplace. The study, by highlighting what the organizations are expecting and doing, as well as what they can do, would contribute to reorienting their practices for having a constructive approach towards building the organization on trust and confidence of all the stake holders especially the employees and management who together drive the organization, challenge the competitive business world with excellent organizational culture and strategies.

## 6. HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

Ho<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant difference between conflicts of employees based on salary, role, promotion and type of conflict.

Ho<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant difference between inter-personal relationships and stress.

Ho<sub>3</sub>: There is no significant difference between conflicts of gender bias and management practices.

## 7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research will be based on a systematic collection of data through primary and secondary sources. The data has been collected through questionnaire and personal interview. By using convenience sampling method, the sample size of 72 has been taken.

**Type of Respondents:** Supervisors, Executives (Conflict managers) in different organizations (Selected Manufacturing Units).

*Ho<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant difference between conflicts of employees based on salary, role, promotion and conflicts of employee based on work and stress.*

To test the above formulated hypothesis, Pearson's correlation test is employed. The correlation analysis was used to know the magnitude of the relationship between salary, role promotion and conflicts of employee based on work and stress.

**Table 1 Cross table of employee conflicts on salary, role, promotion and work**

Conflicts	Salary	Role	Promotion	Work
Inter personal Conflicts	45	52	60	30
Intra Personal Conflicts	10	8	10	20
Inter Group Conflicts	17	12	2	22

**Table 2 correlation table of causes of conflict**

(N=72)

Variables		salary	role	promotion	work	conflicts
conflicts	Pearson Correlation	-.756	-.822	-.923	-.778	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.454	.386	.252	.433	

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The correlation table no.2 refers that the conflicts based on salary stands at  $-7.56$ , role at  $-.822$ , promotion at  $-.923$  and conflict based on work at  $-.778$ . All these constraints imply its effect on type of conflicts. thus, the final result says that there is no significant difference between conflicts of employees based on salary, role, promotion and conflicts of employee based on work and stress. And  $H_{01}$  is accepted.

**2. There is no significant difference between inter-personal relationships and stress.**

To test the  $H_{02}$  hypothesis , the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) has been to know the ‘F’ and significance value between conflicts and occurrences.

**Table 3. Occurrence of conflict and its impact on type of conflict on stress levels.**

Types of Conflicts	Occurrence of conflict	Stress levels
Inter personal conflict	49	High
Intra personal conflict	10	Average
Inter group Conflict	13	High

**Table 4. ANOVA test result on occurrence of conflict and stress levels**

ANOVA Test Result between Occurrence of Conflict and stress levels					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	294.000	1	294.000	.454	.623
Within Groups	648.000	1	648.000		
Total	942.000	2			

By employing ANOVA between type of conflict and stress levels, it was noted that the F Value is at  $.454(p>0.05)$ . Hence there is no statistical significant relationship between occurrence of conflict and stress level. Thus,  $H_{02}$  is accepted.

**3. There is no significant difference between conflicts of gender and conflicts of cultural bias.**

For the above hypothesis, percentage analysis has been chosen, to find the result of the objective framed in the present study.

**Table 5. Percentage analysis on conflicts based on bias on 5 scale anchoring**

Description	5-4 scale	Percent	3-1 Scale	Percent
Conflicts based on Gender discrimination/differences	12	16.67	60	83.33
Conflicts based on cultural bias	4	5.56	68	94.44
Conflicts based on Management Practices/Change Management etc.	2	2.78	70	97.22

The data for the above table was gathered through point scale method specifying 5-1 with

anchors (5-Highly biased, 4-Biased, 3- Partially biased, 2-No bias, 1- No Comments). To examine

this hypothesis, table no. 5 displays the frequencies of recorded responses. The table reflects more on 1-3 anchor scale stating that their organizations are less biased in resolving conflicts.

#### **4. FINDINGS**

- The stress levels increases more in the inter-personal conflicts because as per the conflict managers, the inter-personal conflicts stand up on differentiating an individual with the other and so many bifurcations will acquire the conflict gap.
- As per the study, it is revealed that the conflicts are arisen based on inter, intra-personal and inter-groups. And also revealed that among those the conflicts based on bias are comparatively less.
- Most of the employees in the organization revealed that the variation in role, promotion conflicts is the main reasons for conflicts in their organization.
- It was revealed in the study that gender and cultural bias are having less influencing on conflict management.
- The stress levels of conflict manager during intra-personal conflicts are very less.

#### **5. SUGGESTIONS**

- The role, promotion, salary and work conflicts can be avoided with periodical counseling.
- To avoid bias, the top level management has to plan the strategies to overcome individual and cultural biases.

- To overcome work conflict, the workload should be delegated to the suitable employees' by pursuing their abilities and resources, thereby avoid unrealistic deadlines. It should be essential to give sufficient time for the employees to finish their work in an effective way.
- The conflict manager stress levels are more during inter-personal and inter-group conflicts, it can be avoided through proper counseling for the employees from the initial stage as well as proper facilities (counseling, mentoring) should be provided for conflict manager to overcome stress in the organization.
- Promote an "entrepreneurial" work climate that gives employees more control over their work rather than issues.

#### **6. CONCLUSION**

Conflict styles are typically seen as a response to particular situations. By contrast, we argue that individual conflict styles may shape an employee's social environment, affecting the level of ongoing conflict and thus his or her experience of stress.

Conflict can be healthy if it is managed effectively. Conflict management requires a combination of analytical and human skills. Every project participant should learn to resolve project conflicts effectively. Good conflict managers work at the source of conflict. To resolve it permanently, they must address the cause of the conflict and not just the symptoms of it. They size up possible clashes before "contact" is actually made and then prepare their action plans to handle potential trouble. They should concentrate on



building an atmosphere designed to reduce destructive conflict and deal with routine frictions and minor differences before they become unmanageable.

Those who use dominating or avoiding style will face more stress in the organization to resolve conflict, and those who are experienced with higher levels of task conflict were affected with less stress levels and it also leads to increasing relationship between employees. In some cases, it becomes easy task for the conflict manager.

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### **Weblinks**

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