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ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICT: STRATEGY, LEADERSHIP, RESOLUTION FRAMEWORK, AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

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This paper examines the concept, nature and characteristics of organizational conflict, and presented the relevant theoretical framework that serves as the conceptual foundation for his analyses, analyzes the sources of organizational conflict, discusses the role of leadership styles in managing organizational conflict, reviews models of conflict management strategies, and offers a framework for an effective functional conflict resolution system in organizations and outlined the implications for managers.

INTRODUCTION

People generally view conflict as harmful to organizations because conflict breeds hostility and mistrust among members, interferes with organizational functioning, and causes a breakdown of the organizations. However, research indicates that conflict sometimes produces positive effects on organizations. For example, conflict sometimes stimulates innovative ideas (Bornstein & Erev, 1997; Putnam, 1994), and conflict resolution can prompt re-organization and shape more effective and productive ways of management (Walton, Cutcher-Genreshenfeld, & McKersie, 1994).

Conflict has been defined as a "process in which one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party" (Wall & Callister, 1995; Greens, Leslie, & Marks, 2001). Rahim (1990) identifies conflict as an "interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement or dissonance within or between social entities. Conflict can occur between individuals, groups, organizations, and even nations. Today's organizations are becoming increasingly dependent on groups as the central units of work. While groups have the advantage of pooling their collective resources, their interdependent nature inevitability creates conflict (Green, Leslie, & Marks, 2001). Furthermore, all conflict is normative. It is fundamental to the human experience and is a requisite of all human interaction. Conflict is simply the recognition and subsequent expression of difference in human relations. With this understanding, leaders in organizations have begun to acknowledge their own leadership roles and the essential skills set that reflect the key elements of good conflict management. Once the leaders understand how to apply conflict management skills in their role, they must clearly articulate the essential structural characteristics of conflict management as a day-to-day imperative of the organization (Porter-O'Grady, 2004).

The term conflict has been a common phenomenon because it is an inseparable part of an organization. Classical organization theorists believed that conflict produced inefficiency and was undesirable, detrimental to the organization, and should be eliminated or at least minimized to the greatest extent possible. Views toward organizational conflict changed when the social systems and open system theory emerged. Organizational conflict is now considered as legitimate, inevitable, and even a positive indicator of effective organizational management. Moreover, it is now recognized that conflict within certain limits is essential to productivity (Rahim, 1990); and that all human interaction is fundamentally based on conflict (Tessier, Chaudron, & Muller, 2004). The central truth about conflict is that it is essentially an expression of differences (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2004). Conflict forces us to recognize that diversity and differences are essential characteristics common to all human experience (LeBaron, 2003). Despite its adverse effects, today conflict is viewed by most experts as a potentially useful aspect of organization because it can be an engine of innovation and change if properly channeled. This view recognizes the necessity of conflict and explicitly encourages a certain amount of controlled conflict in organizations (Cetin & Hacifazlioglu, 2004).

Likewise, conflict is seen as an essential part of the problem-solving process. It can also be used to improve group cooperation and increase project team performance (Kezsbom, 1992; Rahim, 1986; Thamhain, 1975). Deutsch (1973) states that "conflict exists whenever incompatible activities occur," while Thomas (1976) defines conflict as "the process which begins when one party perceives that another has frustrated, or is about to frustrate, some concern of his." Moreover, various other definitions have been proposed by other researchers in western countries (Putnam, 1987; Rahim, 1986; Thamhain, 1975). Although the word "conflict" commonly invokes associations with anger, negativity,

argument, stress, vulnerability, and battle, conflict itself is never inherently negative. Like so many other experiences in life, conflict is what one makes of it. Thomas (1976) has noted a family of definitions of conflict, all of which incorporate three themes: interdependence of the parties, perceived incompatibility of interests, and some form of interaction. Conflict may be defined as the interaction of interdependent people who perceive incompatible goals and interference from each other in achieving those goals. Hence, conflict is rooted in beliefs that people hold about their own behavior and the behavior of others. The backgrounds, cultures, values, feelings, and previous experiences of the parties to a conflict all influence their individual beliefs, and through beliefs, their actions (Siders & Aschenbrener, 1999).

Dysfunctional and Functional Views of Organizational Conflict

The dysfunctional view of organizational conflict is embedded in the notion that organizations are designed to achieve goals by creating structures that perfectly define job responsibilities, authorities, and other job functions. This traditional view of organizational conflict values orderliness, stability and the repression of any conflict that occurs. The functional view of organizational conflict, on the other hand, sees conflict as a productive force, one that can stimulate members of the organization to increase their knowledge and skills as well as their contributions to organizational innovation and productivity. Unlike the dysfunctional view, this more modern approach considers that the key to organizational success lies not in structure, clarity, and orderliness, but in creativity, responsiveness, and adaptability. The successful organization, then, needs functional conflict so that diverging views are put on the table and new ways of doing things are created (Bacal, 2004).

The emphasis on this paper is away from resolving dysfunction (negative) conflict. It is focused on a framework for managing functional (positive) conflict in organizations. Resolving dysfunctional conflict aims at reduction, elimination or termination of conflict; whereas, managing functional conflict involves cultivating certain behaviors and attitudes, and designing effective systems and strategies that enhance the constructive functions of conflict in order to improve learning and effectiveness in organizations (Wall and Callister, 1998). As the next section shows, theories have been developed that explain why these behavioral and attitudinal factors can form a foundation and contribute to organizational conflict.

Theoretical Foundation of the Paper

Galtung's (1996) triadic theory of conflict transformation is the theoretical base applied to the analyses of organizational conflict management in this paper. There are three components to Galtung's theory of conflict. They include: (a) attitude (which includes both cognitive ideas and emotions), (b) behavior (which involves both overt behavior and potential for aggressive or hostile actions), and (c) contradiction (the values and interests, between parties or within one person, which are incompatible). All three elements are necessary for a full-fledged conflict to exist, and importantly, all involved parties must be consciously aware of each element for a conflict to be fully articulated. What is more often the case is that one or more conflict elements are latent (particularly a & b). These are considered "structural" conflicts; they have full conflict potential but require orchestration of some sort to draw out the latent aspects. Thus, Galtung argues, the objective of conflict analysis is to identify all of the conflict elements and the goal of conflict management is to facilitate conscious awareness of the elements for the disputants (a process he calls "conscientization" (Bodtker & Jameson, 2001).

Once conscientization is realized, the next pivotal aspect of Galtung's theory is the focus on conflict transformation as opposed to resolution. Conflict management aimed solely at resolution is destined to fail because it strives only to deal with one part of the conflict formation. For instance, goal incompatibility or contradiction (c) is often taken to be resolved when manifested behavior changes (b). However, until one's attitude and emotions (a) are addressed and successfully changed (become transformed), the real or underlying conflict will reemerge. In other words, the inherent contradiction, which exists at the c-level, has concomitant feelings (e.g., of anger, angst, dissonance) and beliefs (e.g., this is unfair) at the a-level. Therefore, it is essential to raise both of these to consciousness (assuming that the behavior is already manifest) in order to transcend the contradiction. According to the theory, the key to transforming conflict elements lies, in part, in the complexity of the conflict. Quite simply, complexity is a function of the number of actors and the number of issues involved. The more complex a conflict, the more potential exists for creative, constructive transformation. Galtung's suggestion to increase complexity resonates well with the notion of generating (as opposed to suppressing) conflict (Bodtker & Jameson, 2001).

The analyses and strategies of conflict management outlined in this paper are also consistent with the

contemporary leadership theories in organizations: Fiedler's (1967) contingency theory of leadership, House's (1971) path-goal theory of leadership, and Vroom and Yetton's (1973) decision theory of leadership. According to these theories, there is no one best style for dealing with different situations effectively. Whether a particular leadership style is appropriate or inappropriate, depends on the situations. These theories of conflict management presented above are flexible in terms of the situations or factors to be considered in selecting and making use of a conflict style. A style is considered appropriate for a conflict situation if its use leads to effective formulation and/or solution to a problem.

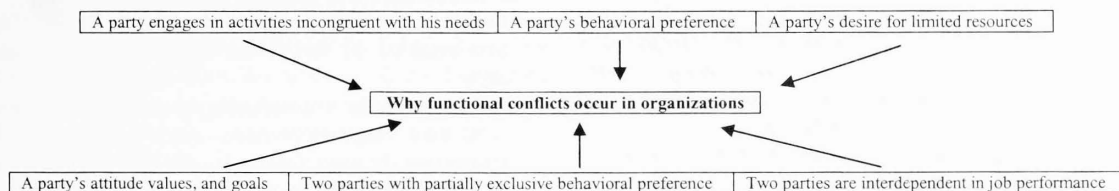
Sources of Organizational Conflict

The complex characteristics of conflict require a fundamental understanding on the part of the executives that every human being represents an expression of values, meanings, personal attributes, perspectives, biases, and roles (Picker, 2003). Out of this complexity comes the uniqueness that gives each human being a personal identity and a character identifying each as separate from the other and unique in the human community. At the same time, this very uniqueness is a

source of expressing and acting in ways that can articulate individual separateness. In addition, human beings form groups based on shared culture, religion, values, ethnicity, experience, and profession. Combined with individual identity, these social and group identities create a complex array of factors containing a continuous and endless potential for diversity and, of course, conflict. These very human differences generate and energize creativity, innovation, and a level of variety of human expression that excites, interests, and challenges us in a myriad of ways (Lewicki, Gray, & Elliot, 2003). Such differences make up the richness of human life. Without them, life would be one dimensional, flat, and colorless. At the same time, they are the major sources of human conflict.

According to Roloff (1987), "organizational conflict occurs when members engage in activities that are incompatible with those of colleagues within their network, members of other collectivities, or unaffiliated individuals who utilize the services or products of the organization" (p. 496). Calling conflict an interactive process does not preclude the possibilities of intra-individual conflict, for it is known that a person often interacts with self. Clearly, one also interacts with others.

Figure 1: Drivers of Functional Conflicts in Organizations



As shown above in figure 1, conflict may occur when:

- A party is required to engage in an activity that is incongruent with his or her needs or interests
- A party holds behavioral preferences, the satisfaction of which is incompatible with other person's implementation of his or her preferences
- A party wants some mutually desirable resources that are in short supply, such that the wants of everyone may not be satisfied fully
- A party possesses attitudes, values, skills, and goals that are salient in directing his or her behavior but are perceived to be exclusive of the attitudes, values, skills, and goals, held by the others
- Two parties have partially exclusive behavioral preference regarding their joint actions

- Two parties are interdependent in the performance of functions or activities

This definition is much more inclusive, which implies that conflict can relate to incompatible preferences, goals, and not just activities. It should be recognized that in order for conflict to occur, it has to exceed the threshold level of intensity before the parties experience (or become aware of) any conflict. This principle of conflict threshold is consistent with Baron's (1990) contention that opposed interests must be recognized by parties for conflict to exist. Perhaps the greatest source of conflict is continuing and unresolved ambiguity (Porter-O'Grady & Wilson, 1999). Without a doubt, ambiguity is the greatest stimulus for misunderstanding, lack of clarity, and conflict responses. Ambiguity permits people to interpret

a potential level of understanding in a variety of ways. Ambiguity allows misunderstanding to become a routine action and allows people to implement action and

processes based on their individual understanding of appropriateness without the discipline and clarity of depth and general agreement.

Figure 2: Three Ways as to How Ambiguity Operates

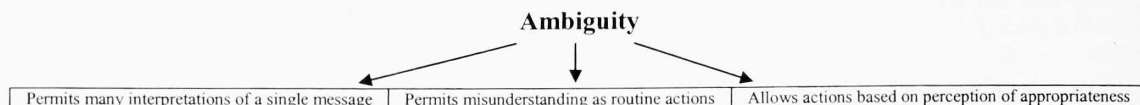


Figure 3: Sources of Conflict-Causing Ambiguity

Elements of Conflict-Causing Ambiguity	
Ambiguity of	
Intention	Understanding
Information	Direction
Purpose	Relationship
Expectation	Roles

In other words, ambiguity operates when the following circumstances are in place:

- Incorrect information upon which others depend on and with which they undertake their own action
- Inadequate information, only partially representing what people need to know in order to take informed action
- Different levels of understanding about the information received causing individuals to act on their own differing understanding of the information
- The absorption of too much information creates confusion and overload, causing individuals to act without the confidence of certainty
- Different perceptions regarding the information informed by personal, professional, or role expectations regarding appropriate action
- Frequent changes in direction, creating confusion and multiple shifts in appropriate response, making clear action indiscernible (Gibson & Cohen, 2003)

There is no more potent and volatile mix leading to conflict than the ingredients of ambiguity and complexity. In organizations, the interface between ambiguity and complexity can be dangerous. Yet much of the time, this is just the circumstances confronting leaders on a daily basis. While differences in understanding will always be apparent in human organizations, reduction in the level of ambiguity is the central element to better managing the work of the organization and reducing the level of conflict (Gibson & Cohen, 2003).

Internal conflict has become a virtual epidemic in organizations because:

- Organizations are flatter and more networked than ever before. Many managers find themselves trying to meet responsibilities that extend beyond their authority - a primary cause of internal tension
- Organizations must adapt to rapidly shifting environmental constraints, such as changing legal and regulatory requirements. Efforts to promote such adjustments often trigger obstructionist behavior
- Organizations are working to increase diversity, a beneficial change that's nonetheless often accompanied by individual clashes in culture and style
- As organizations face mounting pressure to "do more with less," internal divisions often find themselves competing for scarce resources (Susskind, 2004). But to deal effectively with the nature of conflict in organizations, it is important to understand its different manifestations

Leadership in Organizational Conflict Management

A good leader recognizes the sustaining presences of conflict underlying the course of all decision-making, communication, and human interaction (Lipsky, Seeber, & Fincher, 2003). The role of a good leader is not to end all conflict (Cheldelin, 2002), which is virtually impossible. The sound leader must be able to recognize and use skills and processes that move interaction through the conflict dynamic and toward a positive and valuable outcome for all involved. In essence, it is more effective to manage conflict well. To do so, the leader must understand the elements and normative processes associated with the conflict interaction, recognize the

symptoms of conflict opportunity as early as possible, and undertake a process that moves people through any conflict toward higher levels of interaction or resolution (Moore, 2001). Through accepting the notion that conflict is an essential constituent of all human interaction and developing the essential skills necessary to address it well, the executive actually begins to reduce the incidence of all resolvable conflict in the workplace. The challenge for the leader then is not so much whether conflict is present, but when recognized in the communication process, the leader deals with it well and a resolution results (Turner, 2001).

Within organizations, individuals who manage conflict effectively are perceived as competent communicators and capable leaders. Indeed, those who are unable to manage conflict effectively may have trouble reaching organizations goals (Nicotera, 1995),

maintaining positive relationships and cohesiveness (Canary, Cupach, & Messman, 1995; Coser, 1956), and solving problems (Hall, 1986). Individuals who have difficulty handling conflict are also more likely to be dissatisfied with their jobs (Infante & Gordon, 1991; Infante, Anderson, Martin, Herington, & Kim, 1993). Thus, it is imperative that researchers determine how competent various leadership styles of conflict management are perceived to be. Rahim's (1985; Rahim & Bonoma, 1979) work has uncovered five leadership styles used in organization: avoiding, compromising, dominating, integrating, and obliging. These styles associate with a variety of organizational variables (Rahim, 1985, 1986; Rahim & Bonoma, 1979), such as organizational position, organizational climate, job burnout, job satisfaction, gender, and education (Lee, 1990; Posner, 1986; Rahim, 1990).

Table 1: Conflict Leadership (Handling) Styles and their Attributes

Style	Characteristics	Associated Behavior	Organizational Variable
Integrating	High concern for both self and others	Collaborative	Organizational climate, gender and level of education
Dominating	High concern for self and low concern for others	Confrontational	Organizational position
Obliging	Low concern for self and high concern for others	Yielding	Job satisfaction
Avoiding	Low concern for both self and others	Evasive	Job burnout
Compromising	Moderate levels of concern for both self and others	Moderately cooperative trade-off	Organizational climate and gender

Integrating Style: The integrating style focuses on problem-solving in a collaborative fashion. Individuals with this style face conflict directly and try to find new and creative solutions to problems by focusing on their own needs as well as on the needs of others. Integrating behaviors include analytic remarks (such as descriptive, disclosive, qualifying, and soliciting statements) and conciliatory remarks (such as supportive statements, concessions, and statements showing acceptance of responsibility). Communication focuses on reaching a successful resolution that keeps the relationship in tact for future interaction (Hocker & Wilmot, 1998). The integrating style is assumed to open lines of communication and increase information seeking and sharing. This style is both direct and cooperative (Blake & Mouton, 1964).

Dominating Style: The dominating style relies on the use of position power, aggression, verbal dominance, and perseverance. This style is direct and uncooperative (Blake & Mouton, 1964). Forcing or competing behaviors associated with a dominating style includes confrontational remarks, accusations, personal criticism, rejection, hostile imperatives or threats, antagonistic jokes or teasing, aggressive questions, presumptive remarks, and denial of responsibility at the expense of

others (Hocker & Wilmot, 1998). Within interpersonal contexts, the dominating style has been found to be associated with low levels of effectiveness. However, Papa and Canary (1995) suggested that the dominating style might be somewhat effective in organizational contexts when there are production-related goals. In that case, an individual might use power strategies and aggression to effectively accomplish a goal, even though these strategies may be seen as inappropriate at a relational level.

Obliging Style: Individuals who use the obliging style put other people's needs before their own interests. Obliging is associated with accommodating behaviors that include putting aside one's own needs to please the partner, passively accepting the decisions the partner makes, making yielding or conceding statements, denying or failing to express one's needs, and explicitly expressing harmony and cooperation in a conflict episode (Hocker & Wilmot, 1998). These types of conflict strategies are indirect and cooperative (Blake & Mouton, 1964). Furthermore, obliging behaviors are sometimes seen as cooperative and appropriate, particularly when one person feels strongly about the issue and the other person does not. In cases such as this, it is appropriate for the person who feels less strongly to "give in" to his or

her partner's wishes. Obliging may also be a particularly appropriate strategy when the conflict cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of two parties.

Avoiding Style: Avoiding or withdrawing occurs when people physically or psychologically remove themselves from the conflict scene or episode often by denying the conflict, being indirect and evasive, changing and/or avoiding topics, employing noncommittal remarks, and making irrelevant remarks or joking as a way to avoid dealing with the conflict at hand (Hocker & Wilmot, 1998). The avoiding style is indirect and uncooperative. It can be frustrating to interact with someone who uses the avoiding style. One individual may want to talk about issues and solve problems, while the other recoils from interaction. This can leave the conflict issue to stew, creating what has been termed the "chilling effect", with disputants becoming increasingly cold and withdrawn (Roloff & Cloven, 1990).

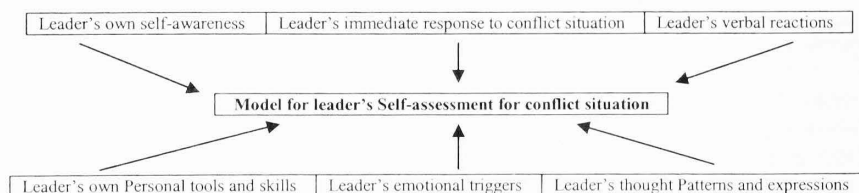
Compromising Style: The compromising style is unique in that it represents the mid-point on the dimension of production orientation versus people orientation. As such, it is somewhat focused on individual goals, as well as on the needs of others. This style is also seen as moderately direct and cooperative (Blake & Mouton, 1964). Compromising requires searching for an intermediate position, through strategies such as splitting the difference, meeting the partner halfway, suggesting a trade-off, maximizing wins while minimizing losses, and offering a quick, short-term resolution to the conflict at hand. As such, compromising typically satisfies some of each person's needs, but not all of them. When people have radically different goals and cannot collaborate to create a solution that will satisfy all of their needs, compromising is often seen as the best option (Hocker & Wilson, 1998). Any development process related to the

management of conflict in organizations should include the assessment of the leaders' emotional comfort with conflict situations. If leaders are to effectively guide others in the development of appropriate responses to conflict situations, each leader must reflect a level of comfort when dealing with normative conflict. This comfort with conflict should be well ensconced in the leader's behavior patterns.

Leader's Disposition Toward Conflict

Perhaps one of the most significant influences with regard to the potential for functional conflict management is the leader's disposition toward conflict. The potential for conflict and conflict itself can generate a wide variety of emotional responses. A negative disposition toward conflict informs leaders with regard to how they will approach conflict situations. The full range of emotional content, from excitement to panic, create an individualized set of circumstances that influences the wide varieties of responses to conflict in the organization. The leader's individual and personal disposition toward conflict is one of the most critical influences related to getting at conflict early and well in organizational settings. Although it is valuable for organizations to undertake ongoing educational processes and activities in relation to handling functional conflict effectively, it is equally important for the leader to be aware of individual emotional responses to conflict among those the leader facilitates. More importantly, it is wise for good leaders to be aware of their responses to conflict situations. Because leaders create the context for organization behavior and effective processes, they must recognize that their own behaviors in the presence of conflict set the tone for how the organization approaches conflict situations (Bowling and Hoffman, 2003).

Figure 4: Elements That Influence a Leader's Conflict Management Ability



As shown above in figure 4, before confronting conflict situations or guiding others in doing so, leaders should have resolved the following issues regarding their own consideration and response to conflict:

- Awareness of the manifestations and characteristics of personal tension in the presence of conflict
- The instant reaction generating from the individual at the outset of an instant response to a conflict

- The instant personal language and linguistic reactions in the moment of conflict response
- Personal thought patterns and expressions that are generated at the outset of a conflict event
- The leader's own emotional triggers to the energetic, tense, or violent momentary reaction of others in a conflict situation
- Leader's own access to personal tools and skills that tap into a balanced, rational, and equitable response to conflict situations (Porter-O'Grady, 2004)

The leader's own personal and managerial characteristics, including the leader's own interests, biases and conflict-intervention capacities, influence the possibilities for intervention in the conflict. The nature of the leader's relationship with the protagonists, including the degree of interpersonal trust and their relative statuses, also conditions the intervention possibilities. When the leader intervenes, there is interaction and reciprocal feedback between the leader and the protagonists and their conflict. Since in some functional conflict situations the leader cannot or should not intervene, the leader may need to make use of an independent resource person to intervene or to assist in the intervention (Nugent, 2002).

Each leader has to undertake the above personal inventory and enumerate the individual responses to conflict events. Personal development will depend on the needs identified as an outflow from an honest and frank personal assessment of one's conflict facility. Because functional conflict is normative, the leader should expect that workers embed elements of conflict at some level of intensity in every kind of interaction in the workplace. The wise and effective leader develops a high level of intuitive and process skills in facilitating the work and interaction of others to anticipate the normally embedded elements of conflict, and the early management of the conflict process as part of the ordinary and usual function of good leadership (Porter-O'Grady, 2004).

A variety of competencies is needed for a leader to transition from conflict management. Intervention in conflict situations requires training and understanding of the dynamics of interpersonal and inter-group conflict. The leader needs some knowledge and training in arbitration, facilitating bargaining, and collaborative decision-making as well as skills in establishing and managing appropriate procedures for these approaches. The leader's role in the collaborative decision-making approach requires knowledge and skills in dealing with positive conflict situations, relationship building, and the facilitation of interpersonal and inter-group

communications and processes. Effective interpersonal communication skills are essential, including active listening, giving and receiving appropriate feedback, and asking good questions (Cavenagh, 2000).

The attitude necessary to use these skills effectively include the capacity to empathize, to reserve judgment, to accept complexity, ambiguity and contradictions, to focus on both content and process, to accept the expression of emotions and interpersonal tensions, to resist stress, and to entertain a variety of frame of reference. The leader must show respect for, and constantly work toward increased recognition and empowerment of the protagonists. Again, self-awareness is an essential quality for effective intervention (Slaikue and Hasson, 1998).

The leader might decide to intervene personally but also use the resource person as a supporting coach in areas in which the leader lacks competence. The coaching will help develop the leader's skills and attitudes for future interventions. The leader should evaluate the extent to which he/she possesses the appropriate knowledge, skills, and attitude. In the short-term, this self-assessment will allow the leader to identify the kinds of interventions he/she is able to make and the kinds of resources needed. Over the long-term, self-assessment will help the leader to develop his/her competence through coaching or through professional activities in order to intervene more effectively in functional (positive) conflict situations.

Models of Organizational Conflict Management Strategies

Various models of conflict management strategies, such as the associative model, the confrontational (resolution) model, and the regulative model, have been developed throughout the years. Rahim and Bonoma (1979) differentiated the styles of handling interpersonal conflict along two basic dimensions: concern for self and concern for others. These dimensions explain the degree (high or low) to which a person wants to satisfy the concern for others. Moreover, these dimensions portray the motivational orientations of a given individual during conflict. Studies by Ruble and Thomas (1976) and Van De Vliet and Kabanoff (1990) support these dimensions. The table below shows the corresponding cultural category for each of these models. The table also makes cross reference to Hofstade's and Schwartz's cultural dimensions (Green, Afzalur, Buntzman, and White, 1999). Although conflict management models have different names, they more or less serve for the same purposes (Kozan, 1997).

Table 2: Relation of Dimensions of Culture to Three Conflict Management Models

Culture Typology	Conflict Management Models		
	HARMONY	CONFRONTATIONAL (Resolution)	REGULATIVE
Glen (1981)	Associative	Abstractive, Neo-particularistic	Abstractive, Co-subjective
Hofstede (1991)	Collectivist	High Individualism & Low Uncertainty Avoidance	High Individualism & High Uncertainty Avoidance
Schwartz (1994)	Conservative	High Autonomy & Low Egalitarian Commitment	High Autonomy & High Egalitarian Commitment

Source: (Green, Afzalur, Buntzman, and White, 1999)

Harmony Model: This model is associated with attempting to play down the differences and emphasizing commonalities to satisfy the concern of the other party. This model is useful when a party is not familiar with the issues involved in a conflict or the other party is right and the issue is much more important to the other party. Moreover, this model is used when a party is willing to give up something with the hope of getting some benefit from the other party when needed. Furthermore, this strategy may be appropriate when a party is dealing from a position of weakness or believe that preserving relational harmony is important. Finally, the harmony model is inappropriate if the issue involved in a conflict situation is important to one party and the party believes that he or she is right. It is also inappropriate when a party believes that the other party is wrong or unethical.

Confrontational Model: This model is appropriate when the issues involved in a conflict are important to one party or an unfavorable decision by the other party may be harmful to one party. This strategy may be used if the issues involve routine matters or speedy decision is required. Moreover, this model may be used in dealing with the implementation of unpopular courses of action. The confrontation model is inappropriate when the issues involved in conflict are complex and there is enough time to make a good decision. When both parties are equally powerful, using this strategy by one or both parties may lead to stalemate. Finally, this model is inappropriate when the issues are not important to the one of the parties. Subordinates, who possess high degree of competence, may not like a supervisor who uses this strategy.

Regulative Model: This model may be used when the potential dysfunctional effect of confronting the other party outweighs the benefits of the resolution of conflict. This strategy may be used to deal with some trivial or minor issues or a cooling off period is needed before a complex conflict can be effectively dealt with. The regulative model is inappropriate when the conflict issues

are important to one party. This strategy is also inappropriate when it is the responsibility of one party to make decisions, when the other parties are unwilling to wait, or when prompt action is required (Green, Afzalur, Buntzman, & White, 1999; Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993).

The question is what determines positive effects of conflict? Researchers have been especially focused on resolution strategies. Resolution strategies are behavior alternatives or combinations of behavior alternatives that people use to resolve conflicts. Researchers have also proposed a variety of resolution strategies (e.g. Van de Vliert, 1997). A general categorization of resolution strategies falls into three broad categories: collaboration, confrontation, and avoidance/yielding (Howard, Blumstein, & Schwarte, 1986; Sternberg & Dobson, 1987). For example, collaborative strategies include persuasion of others, rational negotiation with others, or alleviation of negative emotions of the opposing party. Some researchers term this strategy as an integrative strategy or as problem solving. Confrontational strategies include tough assertion, criticism, coercion, or threats against the other party. Finally, avoidance/yielding are an attempt to keep disagreements from becoming public; one avoids direct opposition with the other party by yielding or avoiding a topic or situation with which he or she disagrees (Rubin, Pruitt, & Kim, 1994).

Research findings consistently indicate that collaborative strategies are the most effective in producing positive outcomes from conflict. Reviewing a number of studies, Rubin and his co-author (Rubin et al., 1994) and Tjosvold (1997) concluded that a collaborative strategy stimulates productive interactions in work settings, leading to positive outcomes of both individuals and organizations. By analyzing conflict episodes reported by Japanese business employees, Ohbuchi, Hayashi, and Suzuki (2000) found that, compared with other strategies, collaborative strategies were more effective in achieving the employees' diverse goals. Ohbuchi et al (2000) concluded this goal attainment was

the reason collaborative strategies were more likely to produce positive and attitudinal outcomes of conflict.

Table 3: A Dichotomy of Conflicts Based on Differences in Issues

Type of Conflict	Approach	Sources of Conflict
People (Relational)	Collaboration	Disagreements about: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leadership• Work Allocation• Individual Diversity
Task	Confrontation	Disagreements about: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work Content• Work Procedure

Likewise, a crucial variable in determining the use of resolution strategies is the conflict issue itself. A conflict issue is a problem or matter on which parties disagree with each other. As presented in table 3 above, some researchers have proposed a dichotomy of conflicts based on the differences in issues (Jehn, 1997; Pinkley, 1990; Wall & Nalon, 1986). One type is people conflict or relational conflict, which is caused by disagreements about leadership, allocation of work, or individual diversity. The other type is task conflict, which is caused by disagreements about content and procedure of work tasks. For example, Jehn (1997) observed work teams for several months and interviewed the members. Her analysis indicated that the high-achieving teams experienced some task conflicts but not relational conflicts. Another study (Jehn, 1995) found that task conflicts

increased members' willingness to stay on the team but relational conflicts decreased it. In addition, a number of studies dealing with the topic have found that task conflicts are more likely than relational conflicts to encourage integrative or collaborative strategies, such as work-oriented discussion or rational negotiation. They are also more likely to lead to constructive outcomes such as improvement of the quality of group decision, group and personal performance, and members' satisfaction with or commitment to group (Amason & Schweiger, 1994; Schweiger, Sandberg, & Regin, 1986; Staw, Sandelands, & Dutton, 1981).

Several conflict management scholars (Amason, 1996; Jehn, Northcraft, & Neale, 1999; Rahim, 2001) have suggested that conflict management strategies involve recognition of the following:

Table 4: Taxonomy of Affective and Cognitive Conflicts in Organizations.

Nature of Conflict	Focus	Causes	Overall Impact
Affective	Emotional or personal issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Personal attacks• Racial disharmony• Sexual harassment	Negative impact on organizations
Cognitive	Work/production issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Task• Policies	Positive impact on organizations

Certain types of conflicts such as affective conflicts, which may have negative effects on individual and group performance, have to be reduced. These conflicts are generally caused by the negative reactions of organizational members (e.g., personal attacks of group members, racial disharmony, and sexual harassment).

There are other types of conflicts, such as cognitive conflict, that may have positive effects on the individual and group performance. These conflicts relate to disagreements relating to tasks, policies, and other organizational issues. Conflict management strategies involve generation and maintenance of a moderate amount of these conflicts. Organizational members while interacting with each other will be required to deal with their disagreements constructively. This calls for learning how to use different conflict-handling styles to

deal with various situations effectively. Therefore, in order for conflict management strategies to be effective, they should satisfy certain criteria. These have been derived from the diverse literature on organizational theory and organizational behavior.

The following criteria are particularly useful for conflict management strategies, but in general, they must be useful for decision making in management:

- Organizational learning and effectiveness - conflict management strategies should be designed to enhance organizational learning (Luthans, Rubach, & Marsnik, 1995; Tompkins, 1995). It is expected that organizational learning will lead to long-term effectiveness. In order to attain this objective, conflict management strategies must be designed to enhance

enhance critical and innovative thinking to learn the process of diagnosis and intervention in the right problems

- Needs of stakeholders - conflict management strategies should be designed to satisfy the needs and expectation of the strategic constituencies (stakeholders) and to attain a balance among them. Mitroff (1998) strongly suggests picking the right stakeholders to solve the right problems. Sometimes multiple parties are involved in a conflict in an organization and the challenge of conflict management would be to involve these parties in a problem solving process that will lead to collective learning and organizational effectiveness. It is expected that this process will lead to satisfaction of the relevant stakeholders
- Ethics - Mitroff (1998) is a strong advocate of ethical management. He notes, "if we can't define a problem so that it leads to ethical actions that benefit humankind, then either we haven't defined or are currently unable to define the problem properly" (p. 148)

Conflict as a Neutral Phenomenon in Organizations

Conflict is a neutral, inevitable part of organizational life. It is both the constant companion and frequent trigger of change. Conflict is not inherently a disruption of order, a negative experience, a battle between incompatible self-interests, a struggle between absolutes, or a sign that a relationship is bad. Rather, one can choose to see conflict as a natural and neutral consequence of growth and diversity and an opportunity for mutually beneficial change. It can be viewed as a call to understand competing, but not necessarily incompatible, preferences and values. And we can anticipate conflict as a periodic occurrence in any relationship that can be channeled toward growth or dissolution. Depending on how the conflict is managed, the experience can be growth enhancing for the parties involved and for the organization as a whole. Or it can be destructive to relationships and self-esteem. Conflict well managed by top management can tap the creativity and problem-solving skills of all organizational members, taking advantage of different gender, cultural, and role perspectives to create mutually beneficial solutions. Conversely, conflict negatively perceived and poorly managed by top management or consistently avoided reduces productivity, undermines trust, and may spawn additional conflict (Siders & Aschenbrener, 1999).

Similarly, conflict can be a negative force that threatens organizational unity, business partnerships, team relationships, and interpersonal connections. It can cause us to be aware of our essential relationships and a generator of commitment, connection, collaboration, and community - all of which define effective organizations. Conflict can represent a loss of perspective regarding common problems and the creation of unnecessary boundaries obstructing cooperation, participation, communication, and quality. It can also spark personal and organizational learning by helping people to openly, honestly and empathetically discuss the issues that are blocking their relationships.

One key role of top management in turning conflict into a positive force in their organizations is the creation of long-term conflict-resolution processes and systems that encourage people to work through conflicts - and to use them to build better partnerships. As members of top management encourage quality, participation, and partnership, they also need to design conflict resolution systems that encourage a return to collaborative problem-solving when communication breaks down. They must understand that conflicts can be best understood not as isolated incidents but as systems that generate and reinforce disputes. Resolution processes, therefore, also need to be established as systems to counteract and remedy those that produce the conflicts. Unfortunately, in many organizations today, there often emerges a desire to either fight it out or retreat and accommodate it. Both of these approaches mean abandoning the possibility of personal and organizational learning, healthier relationships, honest communication, and improved results (Cloe & Goldsmith, 2000).

Another key role of top management is the development of leadership at all levels of the organization. This leadership development at all levels of the firm would include dialogue around shifts in policies and practices requiring employee engagement. This new level of engagement in conflict resolution changes the nature of the relationship between employees and the workplace, managers and employees, and employees' ownership of their own problem-solving. This also calls for top management to require managers to fully understand the practical and applied implications of shifting behaviors, practices, and the model of organization problem-solving necessary to support staff involvement.

A well-planned long-term conflict resolution program can provide a viable option for addressing these conflict concerns embedded in the work relationship. Careful

development of conflict resolution programs with regard to design, structure, implementation, and evaluation of such programs provides a foundation for ensuring that these programs can be effective and viable tools for dealing with workers' issues, differences, and conflicts. Through careful attendance to the details in developing such programs, organizations and systems can significantly benefit from the increased involvement of all levels of employees. Ownership in resolving organizational conflict can further ensure the highest possible quality of output, human interaction, and problem resolution (Porter-O'Grady, 2004).

Developing effective conflict resolution skills in executive team members is a crucial action to a much broader consideration of conflict resolution as an organizational process. Once the notion of conflict as a positive force becomes a fundamental subset of the understanding of the expression of the role of top executives, it is not a far-reaching notion to make developing and engaging conflict processes a fundamental skill set for all people in the organization (Wenger & Mockli, 2003). Hence, for top managers, creating an organizational mindset that approaches conflict as part of the ordinary and usual practices of doing business in the system should be considered an essential attribute of the organizational milieu.

Building a culture that is not conflict adverse is neither an easy nor a simple undertaking. It begins with the organization's highest level of management and leadership and from there moves throughout the whole organization (Constantino & Merchant, 1998). Conflict-engaging organizations reflect the top management's commitment and subsequent expectation of the positive embracing of organizational conflict. Evidence of this commitment from members of top management is their continuing development and growth in the skillful handling of potential and unfolding conflict. It means for the organization an investment in the systematic and effective process of skill development, application, and evaluation in relationship to conflict management. Good structures of conflict resolution reflect the organization's commitment to conflict resolution processes, making it possible for every member of the organization to develop a facility for dealing with conflicts.

Important to the management and facilitation of conflict resolution within the organization is the top management's recognition that conflict is a neutral and fundamental aspect of all human interactions. Reflecting this, leaders ensure that their own behavior exemplifies an ability to embrace conflict as a neutral phenomenon in organization and use conflict management skills as a

fundamental part of the exercise of good leadership. Finally, it is top management's role to indicate its broad commitment to making conflict management an inherent part of the expectations of work performance through the development of conflict management and mediation programs that operate as part of the structure of work at every level of the organization (Gibson, 2003). This will enable top management to reap the benefits of functional conflict through increased workers' creativity and improved organization-wide productivity. The section below outlines what top managers can do to build effective long-term conflict-resolution systems within their organizations.

Conflict Resolution Systems in the Workplace: Strategy Recommendation

One key element in building effective organizational partnerships is the creation of conflict-resolution processes and systems that encourage people to work through functional and systemic conflicts –and to use them to build better partnerships. As leaders encourage quality, participation, and partnership, they also need to design conflict resolution systems that encourage a return to collaborative problem solving when communication breaks down. Functional conflicts can be best understood not as isolated incidents but as systems that generate and reinforce disagreements. Resolution processes also need to be established as systems to counteract and address those that produce the conflicts. The resolution systems should include (a) predictors of conflict (b) preventive measures (c) safety nets (d) outlets for constructive expression of differences (e) procedures for resolution, and (f) methods for making them useful.

The idea is to move those conflicts toward interest-based systems for resolution, such as mediation that will allow for win/win outcomes and encourage consultation before, facilitation during, and feedback after every conflict. It means placing the focus on interests, rather than on rights or power-based solutions, arranging these from low to high cost, and providing the motivating, skills, and resources to make them work.

In most organizations, this means (a) initiating a "conflict audit" to assess the chronic sources of functional conflict in the organization (b) analyzing the systemic causes of conflict and their connections to organizational structure, decision-making, communication, vision, culture, organizational design, values, morale, and staffing (c) identifying from the organization's culture the metaphors for conflict and informal mechanisms already in place for resolving it (d) expanding internally the number and type

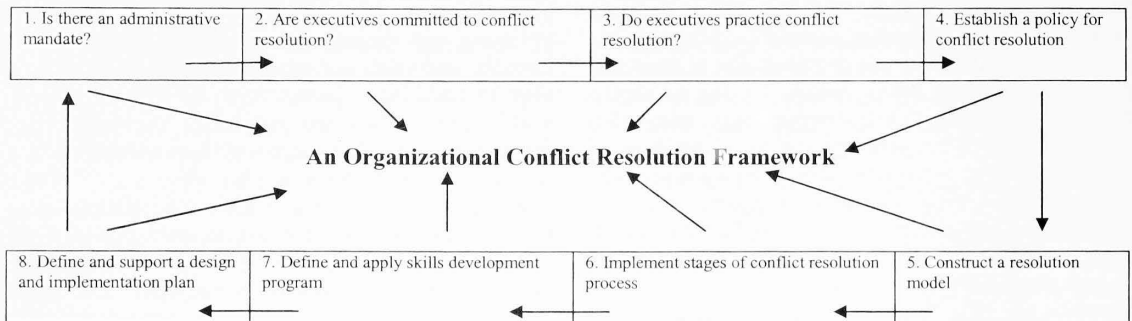
of resolution options (e) shifting the paradigmatic thinking patterns that block use of these new procedures, and (f) continuously improving the quality of the system (Cloe and Goldsmith, 2000).

Similarly, when designing conflict-resolution systems for organization, the strategy most successful in bringing disputes to resolution requires commitment at every level of the organization. This commitment needs to be exemplified in management structures and policy framework. A policy framework creates a format for conflict processes and programs to unfold appropriately. In addition to establishing a policy framework, the senior executives of the organization should establish an administrative and executive commitment to the conflict management program and to communicate appropriate processes at every level of the organization. This

executive commitment is exemplified by the following questions:

- Is there an administrative mandate that makes conflict resolution processes an important part of the management and leadership expectations of the organization?
- Does the executive team's own practice and behavior exemplify a personal commitment to conflict resolution dynamics within its own spheres of influence and across the organization?
- Do executives regularly exemplify in their own leadership practices the conflict resolution processes expected of all persons in the organization as a fundamental part of their conflict resolution strategies?

Figure 5: Stages of Functional Conflict Resolution Framework in Organizations



Likewise, as depicted above in figure 5, the senior executives should show their commitment in the following ways:

- Establish a policy mandate for the conflict resolution process and expect leadership to model effective conflict resolution from the Chief Executive Officer to the first-line manager
- Ensure that the executive team discerns and constructs a conflict resolution model appropriate to the structure and dynamics of the organization and determine how it will unfold throughout the organization
- Implement the stages of the conflict resolution process within the context of a programmatic approach to conflict resolution throughout the organization
- Define and apply within the executive team a developmental program that incorporates the essential skills of conflict resolution to both

exemplify executive commitment and develop fundamental skills in the conflict resolution process

- Define and support a design and implementation plan including model development, performance expectations, implementation, and a timeline for completion as a part of creating the infrastructure for an organization-wide conflict resolution program (Porter-O'Grady, 2004).

Lastly, it is important for leaders to understand their responsibility for managing conflict management processes throughout the organization. The relationship of policies and expectations within an organization is challenged and often confronted directly when conflict resolution strategies shift decision-making roles and processes. Undertaken significant dialogue with regard to the implications and the mechanisms involved requires empowering the workforce to confront issues directly in their own settings. This shift signifies a major commitment from the executives to move much of

problem-solving and solution-seeking to the point of service. This contextual shift in addressing problems - moving the locus of control, investing decisions in employee stakeholders, and resolving problems as close to the point of origin as possible - reflects for many a major new organizational dynamic. To successfully develop this new approach to conflict resolution, undertake a complete review of relational, interactional, grievance, and employee compliance problems, programs, and policies and practices. To successfully implement a system-wide conflict management program, policies and practice will need to be updated to reflect this shift in the structure and format of decision making related to conflict resolution (Porter-O'Grady & Wilson, 1999).

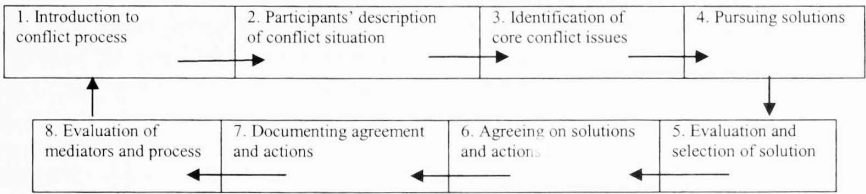
The resolution framework proposed in this paper for managing functional conflict can be operationalized through specific processes, documentation, and procedural activities. All organizational members must be deeply inculcated and highly skilled in the application of the process. The resolution process has eight general stages that must be engaged in throughout for it to effectively impact the conflict and the parties seeking resolution. At a minimum, the following elements are included in the process:

- 1. Welcoming the participants, explaining the resolution process, identifying issues of confidentiality, and

laying the ground rules for the process

- 2. Participants' description of their conflict situation, which includes outlining their issues and giving a language to their feelings and to the processes associated with their part in the conflict
- 3. Identifying the issues main concerns, restating the primary issues, writing down the specific understanding related to the issues, and reordering the identified main concerns
- 4. Participants seeking solutions, including restatement of ideas, notions, suggestions, brainstorming, exploration, and aggregation of possibilities
- 5. Evaluation and selection of participant ideas for resolution, including discussion of liability, priorities of choice, areas of resonance or agreement, and identification of the emerging confluence of solutions
- 6. Enumeration of solutions and specification of impact, response, role, and individual commitment to actions related to the solutions
- 7. Documentation of resolution including specific clarification of all items of resolution, performance expectations, follow-up actions, and evaluations or evidence-based performance follow-up
- 8. Evaluation of resolution process including participants' evaluation of the process, mediator, and evaluation of the dynamics and the process and submission of evaluation for program review (Porter-O'Grady, 2004).

Figure 6: Stages in the Operationalization of Functional Conflict Resolution Framework



The series of structural and programmatic components outlined in this paper should combine to create a system for management development at every phase of the resolution framework that exemplifies the use of conflict resolution strategies. The following is a minimum organizational and structural activities for implementing a successful management development program that integrates each phase of the resolution framework in functional conflict management for the organization:

- 1. A defined and clearly stated commitment on the part of executive leadership is exemplified as a way of

ensuring that the organization will address conflict at every level of interaction

- 2. Executive leadership undergoes conflict management assessment, development, skill application, and testing as a sign of their personal incorporation of conflict resolving strategies in their leadership work
- 3. The organization's human resource service is challenged to develop an organization-wide program of conflict resolution building at every phase of the resolution framework including personal skill building in conflict management, early diagnosis of conflict situations, conflict self-management, and

management of the language of conflict and employee-driven conflict mediation processes

4. Leadership develops and manages an ongoing staff mediation program, formalizing functional conflict resolution as an operating mechanism of the organization
5. Concomitant with the conflict resolution framework and mediation activities formalized in the organization is an ongoing evaluation of the conflict management process and mechanisms within the system. Monitoring and updating skills, processes, and programs ensures their effectiveness and applicability to the issues and concerns at every phase on the resolution framework and at every level in the workplace (Constantino and Merchant, 1998)

Coping mechanism for functional conflict management involves the processes of situation recognition, planning for change, and implementation. Situation recognition entails conflict situation sensing, and situation formulation. Planning for change requires recommending creative strategies to deal with conflict situation, and preparing action plans for intervention. Lastly, implementation involves putting plans into action and reviewing of outcomes and taking corrective measures (Rahim, 2002). The following checklist is a diagnostic tool for systemically assessing and coping with functional conflicts that arise in organizations. The first step is to define the conflict situation in terms of: (a) pertinent issues, (b) history of the conflict, (c) primary players, and (d) other stakeholders in the conflict. The second step is to define organizational factors in terms of: (a) current policies and objectives, (b) environmental influence, and (c) relevant working conditions. The final step is to define personal factors in terms of: (a) personal issues, (b) usual method of anger management, and (c) beliefs about behaviors of others that trigger intense feelings (Mitroff, 1998).

Implications for Practitioners

The above analyses suggest several implications for managers. First, managers need to understand that the initial step in dealing with resolving conflict is to develop conflict-based educational processes. These developmental activities should engage all workers in the organization in both understanding and applying basic conflict principles in the course of their individual work and as fundamental to problem solving in the organization. Managers must also incorporate a conflict education program into the ongoing continuing education format of the organization. Second, practitioners need to

understand that a conflict resolution process should also be a basic skill and work expectation for every employee. The following should be included in the basic education program: (1) fundamental elements of conflict and the concept of conflict as a normative part of human interaction and communication, (2) the elements of the dynamic of conflict and the characteristics of conflict as a part of the expression of human differences, and (3) the basic elements of the conflict resolution process with the stages and steps of conflict identified in a systematic problem-solving format.

Finally, it is advisable that managers understand that the structure and mechanics of the organization's organized conflict resolution process includes methods to access, use, and apply to the individual issues of conflict. Therefore, it is necessary for managers to have a clear understanding of the systematic approaches for addressing and resolving conflict as a part of the organization's mechanism for doing business and resolving issues between the organization and employees, between the management and employees, and between employees and other employees (Porter-O'Grady, 2004).

CONCLUSION

The objective and contribution of this paper has been to provide managers with access to a helpful framework on how to best manage functional conflict in organizations. It will be useful to practitioners in management, organizational behavior and organizational psychology as a source of ideas about the positive uses of conflict in organization. Moreover, it serves as an important point of departure for pushing beyond current conventions in the study of organizational conflict.

Most conflict in organizations stem from ill-defined roles and goals. When people have neither a clear understanding of the overall corporate goals nor a consensus on their individual roles in accomplishing them, relationships and effectiveness deteriorate on both individual and corporate levels. One of the leading causes of conflict in organization is a lack of clarity and agreement about job expectation. Role ambiguity and conflict cause dissension, turnover, and lost productivity. Infighting and a dysfunctional political environment are signs that an organization has a problem defining corporate objectives and clarifying everyone's role in fulfilling those objectives (Allnoch, 1998).

The notion that organizations should avoid conflict is one of the major contributors to the growth of destructive conflict in the workplace. This negative view of conflict is associated with a vision of organizational effectiveness

that is no longer valid. Conflict can be directed and managed so that it causes both people and organizations to grow, innovate, and improve. However, this requires that conflict is not repressed because attempts to repress it are likely to generate very ugly situations (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2004). Systems for resolving conflict have tended to emerge within organizations almost by accident, and most remain ad hoc and haphazard at best. Yet some organizations have begun to recognize that, to be effective, systems for managing internal conflict need to be carefully and thoughtfully designed (Sander & Bordone, 2005). In the end, it's a tricky proposition to encourage the kind of positive conflict that leads to innovation. But when conflict is harnessed, amazing things can happen (Porter-O'Grady, 2004).

Directions for Future Research

In the area of managing conflict in organizations, there are several research challenges. Two of the major ones are: (1) a framework for minimizing or eliminating dysfunction conflict in organizations, and (2) dependence of organizations' success on different conflict management approaches and frameworks.

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