

Conflict Management in Organizations: Historical, Theoretical, and Strategic Approaches

Nanda Lusiana¹, Destiana Utarindasari²

¹STEBIS Bina Mandiri Bogor, West Java, Indonesia

²STEBIS Bina Mandiri Bogor, West Java, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Conflict within organizations is an inevitable phenomenon that often arises due to differences in interests, perceptions, or goals among individuals and departments. This study aims to comprehensively examine conflict management, including its history, definitions, causal factors, functions, and resolution strategies. Using a descriptive qualitative approach through literature review, data were collected from various credible and relevant scientific sources, both printed and digital. The findings indicate that conflict management serves not only as a problem-solving mechanism but also as a strategic tool to enhance team cohesion and work effectiveness when managed properly. Constructively managed conflict can become a source of innovation and work motivation. This study also highlights that the effectiveness of conflict management is more influenced by individuals' understanding of relational dynamics and how they frame conflict, rather than by personality or gender alone. The novelty of this research lies in its integrative approach, combining historical, theoretical, and practical perspectives, and it proposes the development of a training model based on framing and interpersonal relations as a strategic solution to address conflict challenges in modern organizational settings.

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Corresponding Author:

Nanda Lusiana

STEBIS Bina Mandiri, West Java, Indonesia

Email: lusinanda4@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

In the dynamics of an organization or business world, conflict is an unavoidable phenomenon. Increasingly complex and tight competition, both in the internal and external sectors, often triggers differences in interests, mismatched perceptions, and clashes between individuals and between departments. Although the presence of conflict is often considered something negative, conflict can basically be managed into something productive if handled with the right management

approach. Therefore, conflict management is an important skill that must be possessed by every individual in an organization to maintain work harmony and increase performance effectiveness. Anh Tho To et al., (2021) stated that conflict management is a process of managing constructive disagreements in order to encourage innovation and team effectiveness in achieving common goals. Conflict management not only functions as a problem-solving mechanism, but also as a strategy to prevent conflict escalation that leads to team disintegration, decreased work motivation, and hampered productivity. Rahim (2023) showed that the implementation of appropriate conflict management strategies such as collaborating and compromising has a positive correlation with increased job satisfaction and employee loyalty. This is becoming increasingly relevant in the context of modern organizations that demand cross-functional and cultural collaboration. Therefore, it is important to understand the history of conflict management, its definition, the factors that influence it, the functions it contains, and the practical steps in its implementation.

A number of previous studies have discussed various aspects of conflict management. For example, a study conducted by Khan et al., (2022) showed that conflict management plays a role in reducing the level of turnover intention in employees, especially if accompanied by effective organizational communication. However, this study focused more on the banking sector and has not explored the historical approach and comprehensive approach to all dimensions of conflict management in depth. Therefore, this study is present as a continuation of the limitations of previous studies by focusing on examining the history, definition, causal factors, functions, and procedures for resolving conflict in a more comprehensive organizational context.

This study aims to: (1) find out the history of the development of conflict management, (2) understand the definition of conflict management theoretically and practically, (3) identify the factors that influence the emergence and development of conflict, (4) explore the main functions of conflict management in organizations, and (5) describe the steps for resolving conflict that can be applied effectively. The approach used in this study is qualitative descriptive, with the literature study method as the main instrument in collecting and analyzing data.

The results of this study indicate that conflict management not only acts as a resolution tool, but also as a team cohesion enhancer when managed strategically. The novelty of this study lies in the integrative approach that combines historical, theoretical, and applied perspectives in understanding conflict management, while also offering conflict resolution guidelines that are relevant to contemporary organizational challenges. It is hoped that the results of this study can provide theoretical and practical contributions to the development of managerial policies, especially in creating a productive and harmonious work environment.

METHODS

This study uses a literature research method, which is a qualitative approach that aims to explore theories, concepts, and previous scientific findings that are relevant to the topic of conflict management in organizations. This method was chosen because it is appropriate for answering conceptual, theoretical, and historical problem formulations, as the purpose of this study focuses on tracing the history, definition, causal factors, functions, and steps for resolving conflicts. Literature studies allow the author to collect various views and previous research results comprehensively, then synthesize and analyze the information so that it can be developed into a systematic and complete framework of thought (Snyder, 2019).

Data collection was carried out by reviewing relevant written sources, such as reference books, national and international indexed scientific journal articles, proceedings, and credible previous research reports. In addition, the author also utilized digital literature in the form of e-books, online publications from academic institutions, and academic articles that had gone through a peer-review process. The selection of data sources was carried out selectively based on the suitability of the topic, year of publication (especially the last five years), and the level of credibility of the source.

In the data processing process, the author uses a content analysis approach, which is a technique for identifying themes, thought patterns, and conceptual categories from various sources reviewed (Snyder, 2019). All collected data is then classified based on the main indicators of the problem formulation, such as historical aspects, theoretical definitions, causal factors, and conflict

resolution strategies. The analysis is carried out systematically by comparing and criticizing various views from experts, so that logical and in-depth conclusions are obtained. Although this study is qualitative, secondary descriptive statistical data from previous studies are also used to support arguments, such as the percentage of conflict in organizations, types of conflict, and the effectiveness of conflict management strategies in various contexts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Conflict in organizations is not a new phenomenon, but has been part of the dynamics of organizational life for a long time. According to Mikkelsen & Clegg (2018), the history of conflict in organizations can be traced back a hundred years, when conflict was still considered a negative condition that reflected management weaknesses. In the early 20th century, the dominant paradigm viewed conflict as something that should be avoided because it was considered to damage harmony in the organization. Conflict is seen as a deviation from ideal conditions and therefore needs to be resolved immediately if it occurs. However, along with the development of thinking in organizational science, there has been a shift in the way of viewing conflict. Entering the mid-19th century, awareness began to emerge that conflict is not always destructive. When staff dissatisfaction increased and two-way communication between superiors and subordinates was not effectively established, conflict began to be passively accepted as something that was natural in organizational dynamics (Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2019). In this context, managers are required not only to avoid conflict, but also to learn how to resolve it effectively. This is where conflict management skills become important, because conflict is recognized as being able to occur along with cooperation and does not always cause obstacles if managed properly.

The paradigm shift regarding conflict became stronger in the 1970s with the emergence of interactionist theory. This theory offers a more progressive view that conflict is not only something that needs to be tolerated, but is even important to encourage innovation and organizational growth (Puryanto, 2023). Conflict is considered to be a trigger for creativity and productivity, depending on how management manages it. If managed constructively, conflict can actually create a healthy discussion space, strengthen open communication, and increase a sense of shared responsibility. In this perspective, conflict management is not only a problem-solving tool, but also a means of learning and organizational development. Furthermore, effective conflict management can create a conducive work environment, where differences of opinion can be expressed openly, and become the basis for building better decisions. Well-managed conflict not only prevents divisions, but also encourages the creation of innovative and collaborative solutions (Badriyah et al., 2024). Thus, understanding the history and evolution of thinking about conflict provides an important foundation for managers and organizational practitioners to no longer view conflict as a threat, but rather as a strategic opportunity for growth and continuous improvement.

Conflict management is an important process in the world of organizations and businesses, which functions to handle and regulate conflicts that occur so that they do not have a negative impact on productivity and work atmosphere. Conflict is a phenomenon that cannot be avoided in interactions between individuals or between parts within an organization, especially in a competitive business environment. Therefore, conflict management is present as a systematic approach in identifying the root of the problem, analyzing conflict dynamics, and determining the most appropriate resolution strategy. In general, conflict management involves managerial skills such as effective communication, active listening skills, objective decision-making, and emotional management in dealing with differences in perspective (Nahwan et al., 2024; Rahim, 2023). This process not only prioritizes conflict resolution, but also encourages the creation of synergy and cooperation between previously conflicting parties. In the context of an organization, conflict management strategies can include various approaches, such as open confrontation aimed at conveying desires firmly, mediation by a third party to create common ground, or negotiation to reach a fair compromise for all parties.

Management is a process or action of organizing, controlling, planning, leading, and coordinating resources (human, money, materials, machines, etc.) in order to achieve certain goals (Ankit Awasthi, 2023; Maulana, 2024), while conflict is a difference of opinion, perception, or

interest that gives rise to feelings of disagreement or clash (Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2019). Thus, conflict management can be interpreted as an effort to regulate and control the differences that arise, so that they do not develop into conflicts that damage organizational harmony. In scientific studies, a number of experts provide a more technical and in-depth definition of conflict management. Thomas & Schmidt (1976) describe conflict management as a process consisting of five stages, namely conflict recognition, analysis of causes and impacts, strategic decision making, implementation of solutions, and evaluation of action results. This process requires precision and assertiveness from managers in dealing with and resolving differences that have the potential to hinder organizational performance.

Kanova et al., (2024) further develop this concept through six stages: introduction, analysis, decision-making, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Their approach shows that conflict management is not just about resolution, but also ensuring the sustainability of solutions and adaptation if needed in the future. In addition, the interactionist approach also provides an interesting perspective, namely that conflict should not always be avoided, but can instead be welcomed and stimulated constructively as a trigger for positive change (Puryanto, 2023). This perspective suggests that conflict can be a means to renew organizational structures, make disputants aware of their mistakes, and even encourage increased productivity and innovation. With good conflict management, conflict can actually be an opportunity to strengthen team cohesion and improve work processes as a whole. Thus, conflict management is not just a problem-solving tool, but also an integral strategy in organizational development. Success in managing conflict depends heavily on managerial skills, sensitivity to interpersonal dynamics, and the ability to adapt to complex and changing situations.

Conflict management in organizations is a complex process, influenced by various internal and external factors. One of the factors that is most often assumed to play an important role is personal factors. In general, many assume that individual characteristics such as personality and gender have a significant influence on how a person resolves conflict. Cultural stereotypes tend to suggest that men are more likely to use a competitive style, while women prefer a compromising or accommodating style. In addition, personal traits such as aggressiveness, introversion, or need for control are believed to shape a person's conflict resolution strategy. However, a study by Steen & Shinkai, (2020) shows that the influence of personality on conflict resolution strategies is very small, and findings regarding gender differences tend to vary. For example, a study by Hundera et al., (2019) actually found that women can be very assertive in managing conflict. Therefore, it can be concluded that personal factors such as personality and gender are not the main determinants in conflict management. On the contrary, how a person frames a conflict has a more significant influence on how the conflict is resolved. Framing acts as a cognitive representation of the conflict and influences the interactions that occur during the conflict. Framing includes perceptions of oneself, the other party, and the conflict itself (Canetti et al., 2019).

For example, if someone views the other party as an enemy, then the strategy chosen will tend to be confrontational. Likewise, framing in terms of potential loss or gain can also affect the level of risk taken. Balart et al., (2022) found that individuals who frame conflict as a potential loss are more likely to take risks, experience deadlock, and tend to seek arbitration. Thus, rather than relying on assumptions about personality or gender, it is more important to understand individuals' perceptions and mindsets in managing conflict (Dolynnyi, 2021). Relational factors are the second component that is very important in conflict management. The relationship between the parties involved, especially in the context of power and hierarchical position, plays a key role. The study by Chen et al., (2019) showed that individuals tend to use a competitive style towards subordinates, but prefer an accommodating or collaborative style when dealing with superiors, and an avoiding or accommodating style when conflict occurs with colleagues. This hierarchical relationship also affects the emotional dimension of the conflict; conflicts with superiors tend to be more emotional than conflicts between colleagues (Chen et al., 2019).

On the other hand, relational dynamics also involve tension between the need for autonomy and connection between members of the organization. Studies show that relational dynamics in organizations involve tension between the need for autonomy and connectedness between members,

where autonomy often increases work engagement, commitment to the organization, and innovative behavior, but also requires careful management to balance organizational alignment and team independence (Slemp et al., 2021).

The third factor that influences conflict management is cultural factors, both national culture, ethnicity, and organizational culture. In the context of national culture, research by Li et al., (2023) shows that intercultural negotiations between negotiators from two different cultural backgrounds are less effective than negotiations between individuals from the same culture. This finding is relevant to the development of the current global work environment, where collaboration across cultures, time, and geography in virtual teams is becoming increasingly common (Yousef, 2024). In addition, ethnic culture also influences the approach to conflict (Ololajulo, 2020). Culture plays a significant role in conflict and conflict management because it influences communication, perception, and decision-making processes, leading to misunderstandings and potential conflicts that lead to violence. Overall, conflict management in organizations is not only influenced by individual characteristics, but is also largely determined by social relations and the broader cultural framework. A deep understanding of these factors can help organizations design more effective and sustainable conflict resolution strategies.

Conflict management in organizations not only plays a role in resolving disputes, but also has a strategic function in creating a healthy, adaptive, and productive work environment. Starting from the prevention function, conflict management seeks to minimize the potential for disputes through a good communication system, understanding of individual diversity, and enforcing clear rules (Badriyah et al., 2024). An open organizational culture that respects differences and upholds collaboration is the main foundation in preventing conflict early on. When conflict cannot be avoided, conflict management is present as a tool to manage and resolve it constructively, so that the conflict does not develop into a destructive one, but becomes an opportunity to strengthen relationships and create shared learning (To et al., 2021). Furthermore, conflict management also encourages an increase in the quality of interpersonal relationships in the organization. Through a collaborative and fair resolution process, mutual trust, mutual respect, and empathy are created between members (Dolynnyi, 2021). This trust is the foundation for the formation of solid team cohesion and supports shared growth. Conflict also opens up space for the development of communication skills, as individuals learn to express opinions assertively, listen actively, and communicate in an open and solution-oriented manner. All of these skills, in the long run, contribute to increased work efficiency and smooth organizational communication as a whole.

Conflict management also has a direct impact on strategic aspects of the organization, such as increased productivity, internal stability, and adaptability (Ismail, 2025). Unresolved conflict has the potential to reduce motivation, create tension, and hinder the achievement of goals. On the other hand, well-managed conflict can trigger innovation, work process renewal, and improve the quality of decision-making through the involvement of various perspectives (Cattaneo et al., 2024). In addition, negotiation skills, emotional management, and skills in managing diversity are added values that strengthen the competitiveness of organizations amidst the challenges of a complex era. Therefore, conflict management is not only a problem-solving instrument, but also an important pillar in building an inclusive and sustainable organization.

Discussion of the steps to resolve conflict management is an important part of efforts to build a healthy and sustainable organization. Conflict, if not managed properly, can hinder productivity, damage work relationships, and lower the morale of organizational members. Therefore, the stages in conflict management must be carried out systematically and adaptively according to the source, type, and level of conflict that occurs. The first step is conflict identification, which is the process of recognizing and finding the root cause of the conflict. Conflict can originate from internal factors such as differences in goals, communication styles, or unfair division of tasks, or from external factors such as environmental pressure, changing managerial policies, or competition between units (Puryanto, 2023). Identification is carried out through data collection in the form of member complaints, direct observation of work interactions, interviews with related parties, and job satisfaction surveys. The goal is to comprehensively understand how the conflict arises and who is involved.

After the conflict is identified, the next stage is conflict diagnosis, which aims to comprehensively analyze and map the structure and dynamics of the conflict. A proper diagnosis includes recognizing the parties involved, understanding each other's interests, values, and goals, and assessing the level of conflict intensity (Apriliani et al., 2024). In addition, the diagnosis must also consider the impact of the conflict on individuals, teams, and the organization as a whole, as well as examine the causal factors that influence the conflict such as leadership style, incentive systems, or organizational structure. The third step is the solution agreement, namely the process of negotiation and reaching consensus between the conflicting parties (Didit Darmawan et al., 2023). At this stage, an open communication forum is needed such as dialogue, formal or informal meetings, negotiation, mediation, or arbitration, depending on the level of conflict and the needs of the organization. Success at this stage is highly dependent on the attitude of the parties who must be cooperative, communicative, and open to alternative solutions. Willingness to compromise and maintain the principle of justice are the main keys to achieving a mutually acceptable solution.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussion of this study, it can be concluded that conflict management in organizations has undergone a significant paradigm evolution over time. Initially considered a negative disturbance, conflict is now understood as a natural part of organizational dynamics that, if managed properly, can be a trigger for growth, innovation, and improved work quality. This study shows that conflict management does not merely function to reduce differences, but is further an integral strategy in creating a healthy and collaborative work environment. In addition, the findings of this study underline that personality and gender factors are not the main determinants in the choice of conflict resolution strategies, as often assumed previously. Instead, the way individuals interpret and frame conflict, as well as the dynamics of relationships between individuals in the organizational structure, are proven to be more decisive in determining the effectiveness of conflict management. Thus, the success of conflict management is highly dependent on cognitive understanding of conflict, sensitivity to relational context, and managerial skills in choosing an adaptive and constructive approach. As a continuation of this study, it is important to develop a conflict management training model based on an understanding of framing and interpersonal relations, in order to equip managers and employees with relevant skills in dealing with increasingly complex conflict dynamics in the future.

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