

Organizational Conflicts in India and Saudi Arabia

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Abstract. This is an exploratory study of interpersonal conflicts in various organizations in India and in Saudi Arabia. This paper explores possible relationships between the country and causes of conflict, situation of conflicts, frequency of conflicts, resolution and mode of resolution of conflicts, and communication as a means of resolution of conflicts. The study shows that the country has significant impact on "cause of conflict", "resolution of conflicts", and "the mode of resolution of conflicts" at 5% level of significance. In Saudi Arabia, Communication gap is a significant cause for conflict, which is more prevalent than in India. It is observed that most of the conflicts are resolved in Saudi Arabia, whereas about 38% of the conflicts are not resolved in India. This study also presents implications for future research in the area of conflict management.

Keywords: Conflict Management, Enabling Conflict, Inter- and Intra-Team Conflict, Interpersonal Communication, Communication and Conflict Management

1 Introduction

Conflict in organizations has been defined by Putnam and Poole [11] as “the interaction of interdependent people who perceive opposition of goals, aims, and values, and who see the other party as potentially interfering with the realization of these goals”. Thus when conditions of interdependence, interaction and interference co-exist in the organizational context, conflicts occur. Conflict is the expression of this incompatibility [9,10]. Modern organizations thrive on teamwork, collaboration and interdependence [8]. Organizational conflicts are inevitable and studies show that about 20 percent of employee time is spent on managing conflicts [12]. Thus managing conflicts is of interest to both practitioners and researchers [2,7]. This paper analyzes organizational conflicts in the Indian as well as Saudi Arabian contexts to find out the significant connections between specific variables identified in a conflict situation. The purpose of this study is to compare conflict management in two different countries. The situations encountered, why they were caused, how they were resolved, time taken for conflict resolution and whether the ability to communicate helped to resolve conflicts effectively. Organizational conflicts may be caused due to communication gap, lack of trust, clash of interests, competition, and several other individual or situational factors. The findings of the study are based on the inputs received from 94 respondents from India and 48 respondents from Saudi Arabia.

2 Research Questions

1. Does the Situations of Conflict depend on the country?

2. Does the Causes of conflicts depend on the country?
3. Does the Frequency of Conflicts depend on the country?
4. Does the Resolution of Conflicts depend on the country?
5. Does the Mode of Resolution of conflicts depend on the country?
6. Does the influence of Communication as a means of Conflict Resolution differ for the two countries?

2.1 Literature Review.

Before the 1990's, the conflict management theorists [1], generally held that all conflicts are negative and disruptive and as such should be eliminated. Later theorist Rahim [12] with his Contingency View [focus on a complex set of situational circumstances] held that conflict management strategies vary from one situation to another and may be influenced by the circumstances rather than the personality pattern of the individual. Research on conflict management has more recently moved on to include other dimensions of conflict, possible outcome and an awareness of the strategies available [13]. While effective interpersonal relationship has been important to every organization, in the modern unstructured environment the stakes are much higher as roles are less clearly defined and people have to work together in teams [8]. While teamwork helps to bring people together, it also increases the possibility of dissent and conflict. Thus, coupled with the increased need for better interpersonal skills, comes the need to manage conflicts. Several studies [4,5,14] suggest that conflict when handled properly can act as a positive force. The challenge for the practitioner is to turn a conflict into a vantage point. In a study on productive conflict [13], the relationship between performance and conflict intensity is pointed out: though a high level of conflict is counterproductive, absence of conflict also goes with low performance. Studies have shown that a moderate level of conflict actually boosts performance [14]. The focus has therefore shifted from prevention of conflicts to management of conflicts [3]. More recent studies have added several other dimensions to it like criticality of the central issue, power, assertiveness, etc. [2]. Thus, when conflict is managed properly it can become a competitive force for change and renewal [3,14]. While identifying and encouraging enabling conflicts may prove beneficial to the organization, the challenge is to deal with those conflicts that disable the organizational performance. Research [6] has suggested that awareness and recognition of one's own negative perception or mindset and the willingness to change are important factors that would help one to overcome conflicts. The present study is undertaken from the sociological angle so far as the organizational context is concerned and psychological perspectives so far as the responses based on perceptions of conflict situations.

3 Methodology

3.1 Focused Group Discussions / Exploratory Survey.

Management students from T. A. Pai Management Institute [TAPMI], India with more than 2 years of experience were invited for focused group discussions on interpersonal conflicts faced in organizations during their career. The inputs from the focused group discussions were used to frame the questionnaire. These questionnaires were administered to the respondents from similar organizations, both in India and in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The data gathered from the two countries were compared to arrive at the results.

3.2 Data Collection.

The sampling frame for the study consisted of executives from government, private, and multi-national organizations based in India and Saudi Arabia. A random sample of 100 executives from each country was taken for data collection. Out of the 100 samples, 94 respondents from India and 48 respondents in Saudi Arabia provided complete information that was relevant to the study.

3.3 Data Analysis and Findings of the study.

The data collected were analyzed using PASW Statistics 18.

3.4 Influence of the Country on Causes of Conflicts, Situations of Conflict, Frequency of Conflicts, Resolution of Conflicts, Resolution Mode and Effect of Communication.

Pearson Chi-Square tests were conducted to find whether the country had any influence on Causes of Conflicts, Situations of Conflict, Frequency of Conflicts, Resolution of Conflicts, Resolution Mode and Effect of Communication. Chi-Square tests were chosen due to the categorical nature of the data. Table 1 provides the Pearson Chi-Square values and its two-tailed level of significance.

Table 1: Results of Chi-Square Tests for the country's influence

Variable	Pearson Chi-square	Significance (two-tailed)
Causes of Conflicts	29.373	0.000
Situations of Conflict	7.091	0.131
Frequency of Conflicts	4.069	0.254
Resolution of Conflicts	14.754	0.000
Resolution Mode	18.582	0.010
Effect of Communication	4.098	0.393

The analysis revealed that the causes of conflicts, resolution of conflicts and mode of resolution of conflicts are significantly influenced by the county. Two-sample tests for proportions were carried out to further analyze the significant differences in the variables for the above causes. The results of the analysis for the variables, which have significant difference, are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Results of two-sample tests for proportions for the country's influence

Variable	Statistic	p-value
Causes of Conflicts – Communication gap	-4.9215	0.000
Causes of Conflicts – personality/ego clashes	2.1079	0.0174
Causes of Conflicts – Inter-dependence of parties	2.0806	0.0188
Resolution of Conflicts – Unresolved conflicts	-4.0469	0.000
Resolution Mode – Third-party intervention	2.1894	0.0143
Resolution Mode – Mutual compromise	3.1925	0.000

It is observed that Communication gap is a significant cause for conflict, which is significantly more prevalent in Saudi Arabia than in India. However, the significant causes such as personality/ego clashes and inter-dependence of parties are more prevalent in India than in Saudi Arabia. The occurrences of various causes of conflicts for both the countries are shown in Fig. 1.

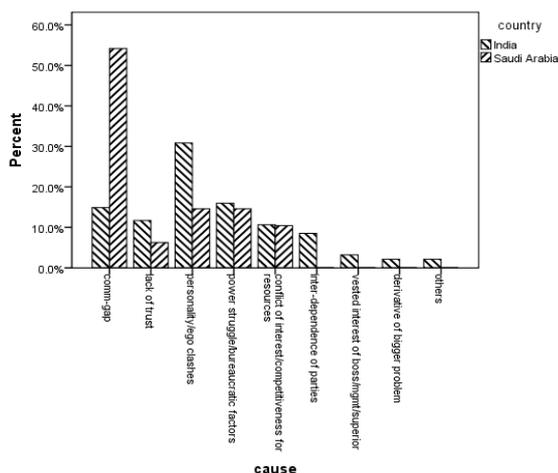


Fig. 1: Causes of conflicts for the two countries

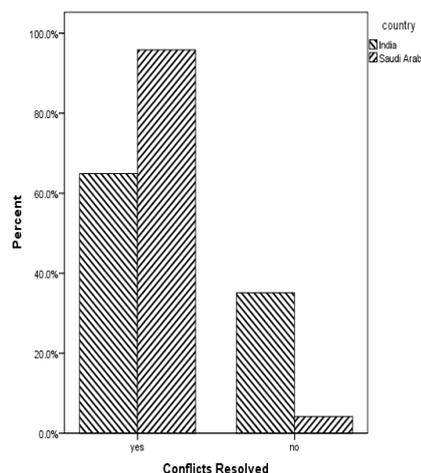


Fig. 2: Percentage of Conflicts Resolved for the two countries

Interestingly respondents noted that conflicts are caused most by Communication gap. While Personality/ego clashes and power struggle are also dominating factors in India, conflict of interest or competitiveness for resources is a close fourth. In fact these four factors account for the major chunk of reasons given for conflicts in organizations (80%). Other larger contributors to discord are lack of trust and

inter-dependence of parties. Communication gap is considered as the chief cause of conflicts in organizations. As stated in the beginning of the paper, the perception of incompatibility of goals causes conflicts [11] and this could be the cause of the power struggles, competitiveness for resources and vested interests.

3.5 How was the conflict resolved?

It is observed that most of the conflicts are resolved in Saudi Arabia, whereas about 38% of the conflicts are not resolved in India. Fig. 2 presents the details of conflicts resolved in the two countries. During the two sampled situations during which the conflicts were not resolved, the communication gap and the power struggle/bureaucratic factor happen to be causes of conflicts. However, in case of India, about 35% of the conflicts are not resolved. It can be observed that in India, conflicts caused due to personality/ego clashes, lack of trust and power struggle are mostly the conflicts which are not resolved. Interestingly, though boss-subordinate, intra, inter-team and inter-personal conflicts occur most frequently, they are the conflicts that are largely resolved.

The analysis revealed that though the common modes of resolution of conflicts are at individual level and through management intervention in both the countries, mutual compromise and third-party intervention are the two modes of resolution of conflicts which are more prevalent in India as compared to Saudi Arabia.

4 Answers to the Research Questions

1. Does the Situations of Conflict depend on the country?

Finding: No, the Situations of conflict is independent of the country.

2. Does the Causes of conflicts depend on the country?

Finding: Yes, the Causes of conflicts depend on the country.

3. Does the Frequency of Conflicts depend on the country?

Finding: No, the Frequency of conflicts is independent of the country.

4. Does the Resolution of Conflicts depend on the country?

Finding: Yes, the Resolution of conflicts depends on the country.

5. Does the Mode of Resolution of conflicts depend on the country?

Finding: Yes, the Mode of Resolution of conflicts depends on the country.

6. Does Communication as a means of Conflict Resolution depend on the country?

Finding: No, Communication as a means of conflict resolution is independent of the country.

5 Conclusions

This exploratory study reveals that the causes of conflicts, resolution of conflicts and the mode of resolution of conflicts depend on the country, which could be influenced by the culture of the organization. In Saudi Arabia, Communication gap is a significant cause for conflict, which is more prevalent than in India. However, personality/ego clashes and inter-dependence of parties are more prevalent in India than in Saudi Arabia. It is observed that most of the conflicts are resolved in Saudi Arabia, whereas about 38% of the conflicts are not resolved in India. Though the common modes of resolution of conflicts are at individual level and through management intervention in both the countries, mutual compromise and third-party intervention are the other two modes of resolution of conflicts which are more prevalent in India as compared to Saudi Arabia. This study opens up new ground for research in the area of organizational conflicts in two different countries, specifically in India and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This would help individuals who are unable to manage conflicts and experience a breakdown of communication because of it, to identify the specific cause and determine also whether it is likely to be resolved. As we observed, most of the conflicts get resolved in Saudi Arabia, whereas in India about one-third of the conflicts are not resolved. The unresolved conflicts, are more likely to cause damage to the individual and to the organization. The individual may leave because of the discomfort caused and the organization would lose a trained professional. It would be interesting to study whether this has a connection with attrition rates in an organization. Sample size limits the scope of large scale applicability of the results. Data gathered from a larger sample size may be useful to further validate the results. Similar studies can be carried out to compare and contrast the cultural differences in different countries.

6 Acknowledgement

The Authors extend their appreciation to the Deanship of Scientific Research at King Saud University for funding the work through the research group No RGP-VPP-013.

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