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E C O N**

Group Presentation

Cross-cultural Conflict

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NATURE OF CONFLICT AND CROSS-CULTURAL CONFLICT

Conflict is generally defined as a relational dispute or a clashing of opposed principles (Crana 2020). While conflict is inevitable in the workplace, it is important to understand the nature and causes of conflict to strengthen interpersonal relationships. Culture reaches beyond a set of values, rather it is a determinant of perception. Conflict is fueled by individuals' perceptions of goals, resources, and power, and perceptions vary greatly among individuals (Avruch 2002).

Cross cultural conflict is defined as "conflict occurring between individuals or social groups that are separated by cultural boundaries" (Avruch 2002). Culture is always a factor in conflict because each conflict that touches us requires us to hold true to our identities, where a component of our culture is always present (LeBaron 2003).

Cross cultural conflict is present in nearly every level of society due to its complexity. While individuals may be a part of the same society, they are potentially members of different groups, organized in different ways; for example, families, religions, socioeconomic characteristics, geographical regions, political parties, social classes, education, and occupations (Avruch 2002).

CROSS-CULTURAL CONFLICT IN AN ORGANIZATION

Cross Cultural conflict in an organization occurs due to the following:

Different Styles of Communication The way people communicate varied across cultures. In an international workplace, people can communicate in the same language, however, the way they interpret particular words and sayings are different as they have different societal norms and acceptance. This is not to mention the nonverbal communication involving facial expressions and gestures along with seating arrangements, personal space, and urgency of time. Even the difference in the observation of magnitude across cultures may also augment cross cultural misunderstandings.

Distinct Attitudes Toward Conflict The way people perceive conflict also varies across the existing cultures. Some view conflict as positive while others treat it as a negative thing. For example, most of the people in eastern countries have a feeling of embarrassment and humiliation when they have to deal with open criticism. They prefer individual meetings with implied comments. Written exchange is considered a preferential way to resolve conflicts in Asia. On the contrary, Western people generally are often supposed to deal directly with conflicts that arise.

Different Approaches to Completing Tasks The way people proceed towards completion of tasks differentiate across the cultures. The prominent factors which segregate them include uncommon access to resources, different incentives

associated with task completion, different notions of time, and various thoughts about task orientation and work-relationship building

Different Styles of Decision-Making The styles of decision-making among individuals vary widely across cultures. For instance, in Western countries, tasks are usually delegated for a person or group of people, who will take all responsibilities to solve and make decisions on it. However, in Asia, people tend to emphasize the importance of hierarchy in the workplace (such as age or title) that only seniors can make decisions.

Different Attitudes Toward Disclosure All cultures have different approaches towards disclosure of the information. Some are frank enough to talk about their emotions while some show reluctance about conflicts or any other personal information. Hence it should be very cautious to deal with conflict and be aware that people may differ in what they feel comfortable revealing.

Different Approaches to Knowing That is, the means people come to know things. For example, Asian tend to refer to knowledge through experience. Whereas African might rely more on symbolic imagery and rhythm as effective ways of knowing things. On the contrary, European cultures focus more on cognitive means such as countable and measurable things to gain knowledge and know things.

CROSS-CULTURAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND STYLES

Cross-cultural conflict resolutions are mostly related to reduction, elimination, or termination of conflict and hence, majority of studies focused on negotiation, bargaining, mediation, and arbitration method (Rahim, 2003). However, contemporary organizations need conflict management but not conflict (Rahim, 2003). In conflict management, some researchers believed that establishment of strategies involved recognition of types of conflicts and learning conflict management styles.

Another currently prevalent model, proposed by Rahim (2003), particularly researched on management styles in interpersonal conflict in organizations. Management styles were divided base on 2 dimensions: concern for self and concern for others. Each style was described in usage of handling different conflict situations.

Integrating style “involves openness, exchanging information, looking for alternatives, and examination of differences” (Rahim, 2003) which is useful in delivering acceptable solutions for both parties. Obliging style is suitable for maintaining relationships. Dominating style should be performed when speedy action is required or “subordinates lack expertise to make technical decisions” (Rahim, 2003) and it should not be used in a complex conflict. Avoiding style should be used in cooling off periods and compromising style will be handy when a complex situation requires a temporary

solution. Compromising style should be appropriate in a situation when parties are equally powerful and consensus cannot be reached.

Particularly, in the field of intercultural conflict, many researchers and practitioners' findings were inspired by Edward T. Hall's proposed concept (high-context and low-context culture). High context cultures are more related to indirect, nonverbal communication styles while low context cultures are related to direct, explicit communication. These two concepts were linked to the concept of Individualism (low-context) and collectivism (high context) in Cultural Dimensions Theory developed by a Dutch psychologist Geert Hofstede. Individualistic cultures direct attention towards "autonomy, initiative, creativity, and authority in decision making" whereas collectivistic cultures appreciate group cohesion, harmony, and collective responsibility in the decision making process (Moore and Woodrow, 2010).

In adaption of Individualism/ collectivism and high-context and low-context culture, Hammer (2005) developed ICS (Intercultural Conflict Style) model which identified 4 cross-cultural conflict resolution style: Discussion, Engagement, Accommodation, Dynamic. His model was based on academic reviews of the relationship between culture and emotional expression.

Each style performs different strengths and is suitable for a particular situation. Discussion style ensures people fully understand others' viewpoint and maintain a calm ambiance. Some typical cultures practicing discussion style can be listed as the United States (European American), Australia, and northern Europe (Hammer, 2003b). Engagement style's strength "includes an ability to provide detailed information and explanations and a sincerity and commitment to the other party through more emotional expressions" (Hammer, 2009). Few examples of engagement style are people of southern Europe, Cuba, Nigeria, and Russia. Accommodation style emphasizes ambiguity, stories, metaphors, and use of third parties to soften verbal confrontation between contending individuals. Harmony is maintained by controlling one's own emotion and a typical example is Japanese maxim. Dynamic style use language elements including ambiguity, stories, metaphors, humor and rely on third-party intermediaries for resolving an escalating dispute. Arab Middle Eastern countries and Pakistan are typical countries demonstrating this style.

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