



Role of Emotional Intelligence in Organizational Conflict Management

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Abstract

The major thrust of the present paper was to examine the role of emotional intelligence in organizational conflict management. The study was conducted on a sample of 66 executives randomly selected from various departments of a reputed private organization. The study applied the following standardized tools: (i) EQ Inventory (ii) Conflict Management Scale. The results showed that emotional intelligence correlates very poorly with organizational conflict management and moderately contributes to organizational conflict management.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, conflict management, private organization.

Introduction

Organizations, in general and Indian organizations in particular, by and large stand with a technically superior work force as well as competitive bent of mind towards problem solving and decision making processes. However, in a majority of organizations, it has frequently been observed that members in organizations are often loaded with problems of inadequate planning, ambiguous reporting and compartmentalization. Actually, the organization provides its member a narrow role focus, not allowing networking which can be instrumental to realize their potentiality. These tendencies incline the employees of an organization to demand immediate gratification of their short term goals, and thus they often lose sight of the larger objectives of the organization. In such an adverse scenario, that emerges from the improper and inappropriate behavioral patterns of the employees likely to influence negatively their commitment to the organizational goal and forces them to be engaged in intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts. In such circumstances, it seems rather difficult to handle the employees with patience and emotional stability. It seems necessary that managers should be emotionally stable as well as emotionally intelligent so that he can handle both interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts effectively. Therefore, a study of conflict management along with emotional intelligence would definitely bring out some insight that would be instrumental to facilitate the smooth functioning of the organization and making it effective.

The Concept of Emotional Intelligence and EQ (Emotional Quotient): The term Emotional Intelligence has a short past but a long history. The concept of emotional intelligence has become a buzzword in behavioral sciences and also in corporate world. It is observed that intelligence or technical skills may help an organization to hire the best available talents. However, it is emotional quotient (EQ) that helps an entrepreneur to achieve the highest ladder of success. Recent studies also shows

that intelligence is no more a parameter for the achievement of goals and success in life. It requires interpersonal relations to get along with others, empathy to have a better understanding of other's feelings, to build interpersonal trust, and also requires social responsibility, assertiveness, stress tolerance, flexibility, impulse-control, self-regard, to successfully carry out activities both in personal and professional life. In the beginning of mid-nineties two most popular books written by Daniel Goleman better known as 'Emotional Intelligence: why it matters' and 'Working with Emotional Intelligence' received global attention for its application in behavioral and science of management¹⁻². Goleman emphasizes that intelligence contributes only 20 percent towards one's success in professional career and the remaining 80 percent is attributed to man-management skills, what he calls emotional intelligence. Bar-On defined emotional intelligence as "an array of non-cognitive capabilities, competencies, and skills that influence one's ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures"³. He coined the term (EQ) to describe his approach to assess emotional and social competencies. The author uses the term "emotional intelligence" to denote this construct for several reasons. Intelligence describes the aggregate of abilities, competencies and skills defined that they represent a collection of knowledge used to cope with life effectively. The adjective emotional is employed to emphasize this specific type of intelligence which differs from cognitive intelligence.

As far as EQ is concerned, it is better known for the multifaceted information that it supplies⁴. The EQ Inventory is used by employers as a screening tool in hiring to select emotionally intelligent, emotionally healthy, and potentially successful personnels. Thus the present study assumes that emotional intelligence will have a positive association with conflict management strategies. Emotionally intelligent person will prefer better conflict management styles and will have the preference for strong commitment for the organization.

Conflict Management Strategies: Conflict, in fact, is prevailing in every sphere of human endeavor. It is also true for corporate world. It ranges from interpersonal to intrapersonal conflicts and is caused by a number of factors such as differences of opinion, attitudes, and values, etc. It has been observed that a moderate degree of conflict should always be present in an organization to enhance and encourage creativity and innovation to bring about changes in a positive direction. According to Thomas a considerable body of academic research has emphasized the fact that conflict over issues provides executives with a wider range of information, a deeper understanding of the issues and richer set of possible solutions⁵.

Various methods for handling conflicts at different levels have been suggested. In this direction two kinds of model have been used: Process model and Structural model. Process model is primarily oriented towards the cyclic and dynamic courses of conflicts where one event follows another, such as frustration, conceptualization of the conflict, behavior, reactions, consequences, renewed frustrations, etc. Structural model, on the other hand, primarily focused on factors influencing the conflict and the behavior of the parties i.e., the parties predispositions, the degree of mutual dependence and incompatibility of interests, pressure from others, rules and procedures, and so forth⁶⁻⁸. Whereas process models hardly pay any attention to the causes of conflicts, structural models neglect the dynamics and consequences of conflicts⁹⁻¹¹. The major drawback of both these models is their lack of systematic concern for the central mechanisms of prevention and escalation, and for the extent to which conflict management constitutes a strategic choice. Therefore, the intention is to blend both models into what is called the prevention-escalation model. This compound model not only puts the conflicting parties both in sequences of events (process models) and in a constellation of forces (structural model), but also emphasizes, respectively, the preventive or escalating nature of all kinds of spontaneous and strategic conflict management.

People in organization use various strategies to handle conflict to counteract the immediate demand of the situation. The concept of conflict management emphasized that conflict management strategies require a viable rather than a fixed approach. Pareek proposed eight types of conflict management strategies used in organizational set –up under avoidance and approach mode of conflict. The avoidance model of conflict includes resignation, withdrawal, appeasement and diffusion, whereas the approach model encompasses confrontation, arbitration, compromise and negotiation. Application of any of these conflict handling strategies depends upon the criticality of conflict issues and in-group integration¹²⁻¹⁴. Sayeed used the eight conflict management strategies to define two major clusters of conflict-handling methods adopted in superior-subordinate interface. These clusters were found to be relatively independent of each other. Within the cluster, strategies overlapped with one another¹⁵.

Managing conflicts is a challenging task. It requires appropriate selection of strategies which in turn depends on a person's management skills what we call emotional intelligence. Literature on emotional intelligence shows that emotionally intelligent persons found to be more effective in successful resolution of interpersonal conflicts¹⁶.

Effective handling of organizational conflict or selection of a right kind of strategy depends on the interpersonal efficiency and understanding of others. Since emotionally intelligent people possesses many of these qualities, so it may be assumed that emotional intelligence will be positively correlated with assertive conflict management strategy. With this assumption in view the study was carried out.

Objective: The objective of the study was to examine the role of emotional intelligence in organizational conflict management.

Research Methodology

A group of 66 executives were randomly selected from a reputed private sector company located in Bihar. The age varies from 30-55 years having seven years of service experience on the present job. The following tools were used for data collection: i. Emotional Quotient Inventory (Bar-On, 1997), ii. Conflict Management Scale (Sayeed, 2001), iii. Demographic Data Sheet

Emotional Quotient Inventory: The Emotional Quotient Inventory was developed by Reuven Bar-On in 1997. It consists of 133 items answered on a 4-point ratings. The Bar-On's EQ-I measures 15 dimensions of emotional intelligence. These are emotional self-awareness, assertiveness, self-regard, self-actualization, independence, empathy, interpersonal relationship, social responsibility, problem solving, reality testing, flexibility, stress tolerance, impulse control, optimism and happiness. Higher score indicate better emotional intelligence of a person. The reliability of the subscales varies from .69 to .86 on an average. The content and factorial validity of the test has been found to be satisfactory.

Conflict Management Scale: The conflict management scale measures four style of strategies for managing interpersonal conflicts. The scale consists of 21 items answered on a 6-point rating scale varying from 1- Usually to 6- Never. The score on particular style indicate a person's better preference for that style. For the present study the revised version was used which consisted of four dimensions (avoidance, dominance, integrating and obliging with 21 items. The factorial validity of the tool has been established by Sayeed on Indian managers.

Results and Discussion

The main objective of the study was to examine the role of emotional intelligence in organizational conflict management. In a prevailing world scenario, organizations in general and corporate organizations in particular are changing rapidly in

order to compete with global pace of development. In recent years, it is observed that there is a paradigm shift in corporate world. It is also perceived that technical skills or specialized knowledge proved instrumental for an organization to hire the best available talent but in a majority of instances it is the emotional quotient (EQ) that helps a person to achieve a pinnacle of success. In the beginning of mid-nineties two most popular books written by Daniel Goleman known as “Emotional Intelligence: Why it matters”, and “Working with Emotional Intelligence” received international fame. Goleman says that intelligence contributes only 20% towards one’s success in professional career and the rest 80% is attributed to man – management skills, what he calls emotional intelligence.

Goleman also talked about people with high emotional intelligence may possess better conflict management skills. The major findings of the study indicated that most of the executives have more than average scores on EQ-inventory. It shows that there exist a poor association between emotional intelligence and conflict management strategies. However, most of the dimensions of EI are negatively related to the four styles of conflict management strategies, which is in expected direction. But, these values are not statistically significant. Obliging and Integrating strategy of conflict management somehow significantly correlate with the dimensions of EI. The implication may be derived that EI is not highly correlated with conflict management strategies. Thus it is suggested that the present study requires further analysis on a larger sample before any solid conclusion is drawn.

Table-1
Showing MEAN, SD on variables of Emotional Quotient Inventory (N=66)

Variables	Mean	SD
Emotional Self Awareness	24.31	4.22
Assertiveness	20.75	4.44
Self Regard	29.05	4.65
Self Actualization	28.04	5.07
Independence	19.05	4.25
Empathy	25.89	5.70
Interpersonal Relationship	34.82	6.23
Problem Solving	27.35	4.05
Social Responsibility	32.02	5.43
Impulse Control	22.66	5.41
Reality Testing	28.02	4.41
Flexibility	23.75	4.71
Stress Tolerance	30.06	5.23
Happiness	22.98	4.18
Optimism	27.25	3.84

Table-2
Showing Mean, SD on variables of Organizational Conflict Scale (N=66)

Variables	Mean	SD
Avoidance	19.35	05.35
Dominance	16.51	05.24
Integrating	16.25	05.18
Obliging	07.51	02.75

Table-3
Showing summary Table of multiple regression analysis incorporating EI as predictor and Conflict Management as Criterion

Criterion	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	SE	F
Avoidance	.57	.33	.13	4.94	1.65
Dominance	.49	.24	.01	5.19	1.06
Integrating	.72	.52	.38	4.06	3.67*
Obliging	.53	.28	.07	2.63	1.30

Significant at .01 level

Conclusion

In the light of research findings, the followings conclusions have been drawn, (a) most of the executives have scored more than average on emotional quotient inventory. But, in the present study because of a very small sample size poor association was found between emotional intelligence and organizational conflict management was found. Besides, the study lacks cross-sectional treatment of samples with comparable groups. Hence, the study requires for an in-depth analysis on a larger sample.

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