

The Relationship of Workplace Conflict Management and Employee Satisfaction

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Abstract: In the fast-moving corporate world, employee satisfaction has become the key of the success for each company. Conflict is inevitable in all living organisms; it is a natural phenomenon and social occur among humans wherever and when they are. There is evidence of existence of conflict since the beginning of the creation of what happened between Adam's Son Cain and Abel, and ended up killing someone. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to identify the relationship of workplace conflict management and the employee satisfaction of company X. In addition, this study was carried out referring to pass studies and also by interviewing all level of contacts on the organization both the management and also the staff. Besides, also by reviewing their in used policies relating to workplace conflict management. The study found that there is a relationship between workplace conflict management and employee satisfaction. Apart from that, the results proved that workplace conflict management influenced employee satisfaction. This study is important to extend the understanding of workplace conflict management towards the effects of it on higher management, supervisors and employee satisfaction by using research design and data collection method.

Keywords: Employee Satisfaction, Workplace Conflict, Management

1. Introduction

This study focuses on the relationship of workplace conflict management and employee satisfaction. People have their own distinct personalities, as well as the resources they require to navigate their lives. This disparity creates competition among individuals and, in some cases, a conflict. Conflict arises and manifests itself in all aspects of life, including the nature of organizations. The company has a structure and is populated by a variety of people, each with their own distinct personality. In the course of conflict is frequently created as a result of achieving the goal. If the conflict is handled properly within the organization, the conflict serves a useful purpose. However, there is still a possibility that the opposite effect will occur. Therefore, management conflict is required to transform the conflict

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into something that will have a positive impact depending on the organization (Setyawan, 2021; Ayodele & Olorunsola, 2012). Conflict is commonly described as a dispute over interests or opinions. According to scholars, conflict was defined as a process of communication exhibited in disagreement, mismatch, or disharmony within or between social systems (Antonioni, 1999; Rahim, 1992; Brown & Peterson, 1993). Meanwhile, Deutsch (1973) believes that conflict is a friction or struggle that arises when there is a real or perceived risk or disagreement in the goals, ideas, perspectives, sentiments, or actions of two or more persons. Conflict in organization can occur within intragroup and/or intergroup. It is a phenomenon in which one party believes that another party's goals are being hindered or negatively impacted (Wall & Callister, 1995; Butler & Rose, 2011). Hence, identifying the root of conflict is essential in order to resolve the dissonance that occur in an organization. When workplace conflict is skilfully managed, it may have a positive influence on the individual, units, or the entire organization. For instance, employee would achieve satisfaction in many ways, thus enhance performance. Stress also could be one of the effects of conflict which might impact an employee's satisfaction. A study found that there is a substantial negative correlation between work stress and performance (Yang *et al.*, 2021; Fariba *et al.*, 2013). In other words, the higher the stress experienced by the employee, the lower the work performance.

Workplace conflict management is important to company X because it ensure that employee is satisfy with the management and work hard to contribute themselves towards the achievement of the organisation vision and mission. Conflict management create standards for employee satisfaction and inspires employee to work hard in ways that the business or management expects. Besides, a good conflict management would provide a wide-ranging of employee satisfaction towards the organisation. As a result of a high level of job satisfaction, employees will perform better, have a more effective conflict management style, and be more devoted to the firm (Setyawan, 2021; Jerrell *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, by well managing workplace conflict, it could contribute towards high level of employee satisfaction. Recently Company X performance started to decline. Pondering into the issue, it came to dime light that employee satisfaction was the main contributing factor. Poor conflict management in Company X significantly impacts employee's salaries, workplace culture, benefits, work satisfaction, stress, opportunities for advancement, and job security. Hence, the issue of conflict management might impact employee satisfaction which directly and indirectly affect the company's overall performance. Company's overall performance and will be the major concern for the employer of Company X and therefore, research should be conducted to investigate the relationship between conflict management and employee satisfaction as well as how the predictor variable influences employee satisfaction.

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Therefore, to achieve the research objectives the relationship between conflict management and employee satisfaction is investigated. Consequently, identify whether conflict management impacts employee satisfaction.

This case study can be used as a reference by the management and employees of company X on managing workplace conflict and evaluating their job satisfaction level. Besides, acknowledging the importance of managing conflict in the workplace can be used to enhance organizational performance and simultaneously improve employee satisfaction. Company X will be committed to taking actions to resolve the existing issue through this study, which also provides insight into the impact of the present conflict management.

Not only that, the findings of this study will be of great assistance to other researchers who take part in exploring the same topics of this study. Comprehensive and extensive knowledge of how conflict management affects employee satisfaction should be provided in this study as well.

For government authorities, it might serve as a point of reference for additional research into how workplace conflict management would enhance the job satisfaction level of an employee towards their job.

2. Literature Review

It was once understood that conflicts are time-consuming and affect an organisation in a negative way (Kaitelidou *et al.*, 2012; Meier & Spector, 2015). Although there are no definite definitions for conflict, it is to be understood that a conflict arises when an individual believes that the other individual negatively impacted something important to him or her (Anderson *et al.*, 2004). Based on previous studies, “manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between individuals” are the increasingly agreed descriptions by conflict researchers (De Dreu & Beersma, 2005). Conflicts can emerge naturally anywhere whenever there are interdependencies and restrictions on behaviours which is why it can be defined as “core tension” (Isaksen & Ekvall, 2010). Conflict theory states that tensions and conflicts arise when resources, status, and power are unevenly distributed between groups in society and that these conflicts become the engine for social change (Ashley Crossman, 2019).

2.1 Types of Conflict

Based on an origin and organization level is how a conflict is classified into various types of conflicts (Rahim Afzalur, 2017; Skjørshammer, 2001). For instance, several causes or antecedent conditions of conflict such as substantive, affective, substantive-effective, process goals and others might arise within or between organizations. These conflicts can occur in different organizational levels including inter- and intra-organizational levels which results in a bewildering diversity of potential conflict forms (M. Afzalur Rahim, 2017). In line with previous study, Cox (2003) also identified intra- and intergroup conflict could exist in a workplace. Intragroup conflict refers to arguments or differences among individuals within a team or its divisions over the team’s goals, roles, or practices (Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). For example, group structure and size, leadership style, nature of the task, homogeneity and “herd mentality,” as well as external forces and their consequences are all sources of intragroup conflict. Meanwhile, intergroup conflict refers to conflicts or disparities in power, jurisdiction, and resources between individuals of two or more groups or their representatives. Task dependency, restricted resources, jurisdictional uncertainty, system diversity, and the separation of knowledge and power all contribute to intergroup conflict.

On the other hand, other researchers list five types of conflict in public administration literature which includes data-based, structural, relational, interest and value (Coggburn *et al.*, 2014). There are two other types of conflicts that get the most attention on which are task-related and relationship-related conflict (Isaksen & Ekvall, 2010; Vivar, 2006). Task-related disputes are conflicts on how the team does its work, about the benefits and downsides of various task approaches, whereas relationship-related conflicts are disagreements concerning individuals, their values, humor, and other issues (De Dreu & Beersma, 2005).

2.2 Managing Conflict

Conflict can be defined as a shared interest among individuals. Conflict management will be utilised to mitigate the negative impacts of the conflict and prevent the organisation from becoming misdirected

from its goals. According to a researcher, conflict management is a strategy in which companies and individuals try to recognise and manage differences by reducing the financial and human costs of conflict management challenges, while conflict alignment serves as a source of innovation and progress (Setyawan, 2021; Wang & Feng, 2003). By formulating strategies directly, conflict management can be defined as an implementation of the top management team's innovation where it is also necessary for the process of compilation to be adaptive, sensitive and to be understood of the dynamics that occur which for example are communication flow, social integration and environment (Prasad & Junni, 2017). Collaborative style, accommodation, dominating style, avoiding style and compromising style are the five styles that can be implemented in order to manage conflicts (Rahim, 1983).

2.3 Employee Satisfaction

Scholar define work satisfaction as a satisfied or positive emotional state arising from a positive evaluation of one's job or employment experience (Ali, 2016; Wright & Bonett, 2007). Spector (1997) believes that work satisfaction is frequently assumed to signify how much workers enjoy their job, or certain features or facets of occupations meanwhile Kim (2008) describes that work satisfaction is regarded as an essential workplace aspect that must be managed by effective management. Needless to say, the satisfaction achieved varies among employees in any industries.

According to Hulin and Judge (2003), in order to measure one's satisfaction on work, three aspects should be considered; cognitive, affective, and behavioural. Employees should take into consideration their thoughts, feelings, and actions when evaluating their work satisfaction. Cognitive work satisfaction involves logical evaluation and more objective which does not measure the level of pleasure or enjoyment derived from particular job features, but rather the amount to which such job features are deemed sufficient by the employee in relation to objectives established by themselves or other professions. Unlike cognitive factor, affective work satisfaction is a subjective notion that signifies an emotional reaction to one's employment. This statement supports the definition of work satisfaction by Schermerhorn (1993) who explains that it is an emotion-driven and affective reaction to several facets of an employee's job. Besides, an employee's need is fulfilled when the work satisfaction is achieved. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, several scholars have addressed work satisfaction from the aspect of need fulfilment (Kuhlen, 1963; Worf, 1970; Conrad *et al.*, 1985). An employee's need is said to be fulfilled when he/she feels pleasurable about his/her job or related job features.

Previous studies have investigated factors contribute to employee's satisfaction. Working environment is one of the factors which a study conducted in Pakistan by Raziq and Maulabakhsh (2015) summarized that the businesses (the study covered telecommunication industry, educational institutes, and banking sector) must recognise the value of a good working environment in order to maximise employee happiness. Several other factors such as pay, workload, management attitudes, flexibility, collaboration, and resources. A research in Indonesia revealed that job satisfaction correlates with the work, promotion, work condition, co-worker, and supervision (Mubarak, Palutturi, Zulkifli & Nuru, 2016). Another study by Tutuncu and Kozak (2007) investigated several factors such as supervision, work itself, payment, promotion, and co-workers which the results found that these factors affect job satisfaction among Turkish employees. To emphasize, these factors might or might not occur in certain workplace and some scholars categorized it into two; personal and environmental factors (Giannikis & Mihail, 2011; Spector, 2008; Vakola & Nicholaou, 2012). Personal factors such as a person's gender, personality, social differences, and age meanwhile environmental factors include the job features, salary, and workplace justice. If discrepancy exist in one of the factors, it might affect one's work satisfaction. by implying two-factor theory by Frederick Herzberg (1959), employee's satisfaction and dissatisfaction are driven by different factors which known as motivation and hygiene factors. To simplify, motivation factors can be known as inner forces (e.g. promotion, recognition, and achievement in job) that motivate employee to achieve personal as well as organizational goals whereas aspects of the working environment such as salary, supervisory methods company regulations, and other working circumstances are examples of hygiene factors, or known as maintenance factors that act as extrinsic forces.

2.4 Herzberg' Two Factor Theory

According to Herzberg's two factor theory (1959), several variables may impact employees' levels of satisfaction and discontent. The components are divided into two categories: motivation and hygiene. Motivators included as recognition and accomplishment can drive employees to do better, promote satisfaction through meeting employee's demands for purpose and personal development. On the other hand, hygienic features, include issues regarding the employee's environment, do not motivate people to work more but may cause unhappiness if they are not available. In other words, hygiene concerns cannot excite employees but might reduce unhappiness if handled efficiently. They can only be dissatisfied if they are missing or mismanaged. Company policies, supervision, compensation, interpersonal relationships, and working circumstances are all examples of hygiene concerns.

Herzberg also concluded that after the hygiene concerns are solved, the motivators will increase job satisfaction and drive productivity. In relation with conflict management, this theory helps to give better insight of how these two types of drives could benefit in handling conflicts. When an employee takes into consideration of what drives him/her to work efficiently or to perform better, handling conflicts in a workplace might not be too stressful or difficult to settle. It is also known that stress could influence one's satisfaction and therefore, managing conflict in better ways would enhance work satisfaction.

3. Methodology

The technique utilised in this study and how it was carried out were detailed in this chapter. It was decided on the research design, population and sample size, equipment and measurement, data collecting, and data analysis.

3.1 Research Design

In terms of the case design in this study, a quantitative research design was used to meet the study's aims. Quantitative research design was used to collect data from a population or particular samples. Thus, this aims to examine employees of Company X. Random sampling technique was applied through survey method which several questions compiled into one set of self-report online questionnaire (Google Form).

3.2 Population and Sampling

The precise demographic about whom information is to be gathered is referred to as the target population. (Ngechu, 2004). When conducting research on a group of individuals, it is unusual to be able to obtain data from every member of that group. Instead, sample from the population is chosen. The sample is a set of people who will actually take part in the study. Therefore, the main target population for this current study were associates who work at the Company X in Malaysia. Total of 51 participants from Company X have participated in this study. The questionnaire was distributed to the participants through *Google Form* via social media and online platforms.

3.3 Location

Company X is a manufacturing and fabrication company that provides industrial services. It has a wide footprint of branches with various purposes which includes locally and internationally. The countries are Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Singapore and finally Malaysia which is where the headquarter is located. Hence, the sample is chosen from Malaysia branches.

3.4 Instrument

In this case study, a set of questionnaires, consisting two parts, was used to obtain data. Part A recorded demographic information of the participants. Part B measured the variables of conflict management styles as well as employee satisfaction of the participants. The degree of agreement for

both variables is determined using a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree. The set of questionnaires had 23 items in total, excluding the demographic questions.

3.5 Procedure

Before beginning the investigation, the data acquired for this study is divided into two categories: primary and secondary data. The primary data is the data obtained by the researcher directly, whereas the secondary data is the results collected by previous researchers. To obtain primary data, the self-report survey was distributed through Google Form link via online platforms. In this study, consent was obtained from the participants before continuing to answer the survey. Once the data obtained is sufficient, the data was transferred to the SPSS v. 26.0 template for final analysis.

The secondary data is then acquired by studying and reading related material or doing a literature review on this issue. It is available from a variety of sources, including journals, research articles, and books. Previous results contribute to the present study's knowledge and enable for the generation of fresh insights. Finally, the main and secondary data are integrated to provide the study's final results.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Demographic Analysis

There were 51 participants who responded to the survey, which measured their conflict management and satisfaction as employee. Of the 51 participants, the survey was distributed quite evenly between male (49.0%) and female (51.0%). The majority of the participants were between the ages of 32 and 43, representing for 43.1% of the sample size of 51. The second largest group followed by those between the ages of 26 and 31 (31.4%), and those the ages 44 and above as well as 25 and below correspond for 19.6% and 5.9% respectively. Apart from that, Indian and Malay participants majored in answering the survey with the percentage of 45.1% and 41.2% correspondingly. Meanwhile, other races as well as Chinese comprised only 9.8% and 3.9% of the sample. The survey was majorly answered by those who have already married (66.7%) followed by those who are single (31.4%) and other marital status (2.0%) respectively. Not only that, the survey also intends to investigate the time spend at workplace in a day which the data found that 56.9% of the participants spent 8 to 10 hours while 19.6% of them spent more than 10 hours a day. Meanwhile, 17.6% spent approximately 6 to 8 hours and only 5.9% spent 4 to 6 hours a day in the workplace. The final question inquired in demographic profile is the participants' job grade and the data showed that the majority of participants were white collared (88.2%) and the rest is blue collared (11.8%).

Table 1: Demographic analysis

Variables		Frequency	%	Mean	SD
Gender	Male	25	49.0	1.51	.505
	Female	26	51.0		
Age	≤ 25 years old	3	5.9	2.76	.839
	26 – 31 years old	16	31.4		
	32 – 43 years old	22	43.1		
	≥ 44 years old	10	19.6		
Race	Malay	21	41.2	2.24	1.106
	Chinese	2	3.9		
	Indian	23	45.1		
	Others	5	9.8		
Marital Status	Single	16	31.4	1.71	.502
	Married	34	66.7		
	Others	1	2.0		

Time Spend Workplace in a Day	at 4 – 6 hours	3	5.9	3.90	.781
	6 – 8 hours	9	17.6		
	8 – 10 hours	29	56.9		
	≥ 10 hours	10	19.6		
Job Grade	White collar	45	88.2	1.12	.325
	Blue collar	6	11.8		

Note. N = 51

4.2 Description Analysis

The descriptive statistics for the study variables was evaluated and presented in Table 2. The average score for predictor variable, conflict management, was 35.196 (SD = 4.578). The mean for the observed variable, employee satisfaction, was 46.490 (SD = 8.938). Based on the cut-off value, the participants have a moderately high level of satisfying work as an employee. Apart from that, the reliability of the variables was tested using method of internal consistency. The reliability of conflict management variable with a criterion $\alpha = .526$ indicating the variable is somewhat reliable. Meanwhile the reliability of employee satisfaction variable with a criterion $\alpha = .879$ indicating good reliability. According to Clarke and Watson (1995), Cronbach's Alpha coefficient value of .80 and above is considered good reliability.

Table 2: Summary of survey variables

Scales	Mean	Standard Deviation	Cronbach Alpha
Conflict Management	35.196	4.578	.526
Employee Satisfaction	46.490	8.938	.876

Note. N = 51

4.3 Relationship between Work Conflict Management and Employee Satisfaction

The correlation coefficient result (Table 3) between conflict management and employee satisfaction shows a significant and positive relationship which $r = .624$ ($p = 0.01$). From the result, it can be understood that the positively significant and moderately strong correlation confirmed that employee of Company X who manage conflict well reported to have better employee satisfaction. Therefore, the conclusion made which there is a relationship between conflict management and employee satisfaction can be verified. Previous study supported the finding in current case study which there is a positive relationship between conflict management and employee job satisfaction (Coggburn, Battaglio, Jr., & Bradbury, 2014). In addition, Alabu, Kembo and Otara (2020) found that there is a significant and positive correlation between conflict management (obliging and integrating) with job satisfaction.

Table 3: Pearson's Correlation between study variables

Variables	Conflict Management	Employee Satisfaction
Conflict Management	1	.624**
Employee Satisfaction		1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4.4 Regression Analysis of Work Conflict Management and Employee Satisfaction

Table 4 presents the regression analysis of conflict management and employee satisfaction of Company X's employees. The adjusted R^2 value of .376 revealed that the independent variable explained a 37.6% variance in the dependent variable with $F(1, 49) = 31.191$, $p < .000$. The findings revealed that conflict management positively predicted employee satisfaction ($\beta = .319$, $p < .000$), lending support for the hypothesis made earlier. With a 1% increase in conflict management style, the level of employee satisfaction will increase by 0.319% (β value).

Table 4: Regression coefficients of conflict management on employee satisfaction

Variables	B	SE	β	t	p
Conflict Management	20.345	2.707		7.516	.000
Employee Satisfaction	.319	.057	.319	5.585	.000

Note. $R^2_{adj} = .376$. $F(1, 49)$. $p < .000$

5. Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Discussion of the Research Findings

The study showed that there is a relationship between conflict management and employee satisfaction among Company X's employees.

In line with current findings, a research revealed that a collaborative conflict management culture has a favourable impact on employee satisfaction, but a dominating management culture has a detrimental effect (Choi & Ha, 2018). One of the items for conflict management variable (e.g. "I see my manager to be very supportive when it comes to group task" and "My manager is very transparent when it comes to work related matters") exhibits collaborating way in handling conflicts. The positive relationship found support the previous study which manager being collaborative with the employee when doing shared task could improve employee satisfaction. Having a great support from employer with regard of group task as well as honesty practiced in working culture shows that there is a room for discussion in order to gain everyone's desires or goals. When goal of every party is achieved, satisfaction among employee enhanced.

Another study conducted by Terason (2018), similar findings was revealed which conflict management has an influence on employee satisfaction and organisational performance. A question used in the current study (e.g. "My manager recognizes my full potential and capitalizes on my strengths) explains one of the conflict management which is recognition of one's work. Being acknowledged at work is crucial, especially for individuals who value hard effort and self-potential while performing assigned tasks. Based on two-factor theory, recognition acts as motivating factors which make employee want to perform. Hence, having an intrinsic desire (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) to carry out the task could help employee deals with conflict on how to maximize his/her potential in order for the work done to be recognized. Eventually, when an employee receives recognition especially from the employer, the level of satisfaction improves.

Based on Herzberg's two factor theory, different factors might influence the level of satisfaction and dissatisfaction experienced by employees. The different factors are categorized into two dimensions; motivation and hygiene. Motivators such as acknowledgment and accomplishment increase worker

productivity, creativity, and commitment can inspire employees to perform better, whereas hygienic aspects do not motivate employees to work more but might induce dissatisfaction if they are not accessible e.g. remuneration and supervision. From the findings, few of the items asked in the survey include “The work environment is friendly” and “My work environment is convenient to work”. These two statements are important in assessing employees’ satisfaction towards workplace setting. Being comfortable while working might as well ease the process of getting task done smoothly. This indicate that an employee has good conflict management skills. Comfortable in this statement can be in two ways; friendly environment which is the relationship with co-workers, and one’s workplace is convenient to work which is personal table. The former statement can be supported by previous study which proved that when the co-worker’s interactions as well as leader-member connection improve, so does the degree of job satisfaction (She-Cheng & Jennifer, 2011). To support the latter statement, a previous study revealed that the environment of one’s workplace has a substantial effect on their satisfaction (Agbozo *et al.*, 2017). Not only that, the study also stressed that the need of management improving workers' work environments in order to increase productivity is one of the core factors that influence work satisfaction. Furthermore, Raziq and Maulabakhsh (2015) also supported that there is a positive correlation between working environment and employee job satisfaction among banking sectors, telecommunication industry, as well as educational institutes. Thus, acknowledging factors that contribute to job satisfaction also would improve an employee’s consideration when managing conflict. In conclusion, the study successfully proved that conflict management could influence one’s work satisfaction in which the satisfaction could be measured in various ways.

5.2 Limitations of the Study

The main goal of this case study is to investigate the correlation between conflict management and employee satisfaction specifically on employee of Company X. The survey has given a significant result to support that conflict management do affect the satisfaction of the employees. Though, the Company X’s employee is the only target involved in this study which limit the generalizability of the data to employee of other organization/company.

5.3 Recommendation

Future research might attempt to investigate this similar topic or might add additional variables to gain robust knowledge in this area of study. Researchers might as well discover new variables added perhaps inspire employees to improve their satisfaction. Apart from that, choosing other samples other than the same industry as Company X might be helpful to understand how this association of conflict management and employee satisfaction works in other industry.

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