



Workplace Conflict in NGOs – Causes and Management Strategies

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Keywords:

Causes of Conflict; Conflict
in NGOs; Conflict
Management Strategies;
Qualitative Methodology

ABSTRACT

Workplace conflict is thoroughly researched in the for-profit and public sectors but not in NGOs which are working in a projectified style. The study examines the causes of workplace conflict and management strategies adopted for its management in the NGO sectors' soft projects being executed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa through a qualitative methodology by employing semi-structured interviews of the key informants utilizing purposive sampling. The data are analyzed qualitatively with the help of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) – Leximancer and causal mapping software MindManager. Several causes of workplace conflict in NGOs are identified such as autocratic management style, dispositional differences, resources scarcity and distribution issues, communication problems, intention to quit, psychological wellbeing, emotional exhaustion, induced stress, and organizational culture. However, the key finding is that these causes do not come into practice linearly as suggested by positivist studies but rather workplace conflict emerges because of the non-linear and iterative interplay of these causes means the genesis of conflict is not a linear process but a complex and interwoven process and hugely context dependent. Furthermore, three overlapping conflict management strategies are found helpful only in inter-employees' conflicts but not much beneficial in employee-employers conflict. The study calls for mixed method studies regarding conflict emergence for developing generative mechanisms, especially in the global south. Secondly, as most of the organizational studies are conducted in the global north with exception of China, therefore, there is a dire need for the investigation of such organizational phenomena in the global south where NGOs are working extensively. Finally, workplace conflict in NGOs may be studied concerning other organizational phenomena. Managers may investigate and deal with conflict with a holistic perspective not ignoring the underlying unearthed complex interplay of different organizational phenomena.

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INTRODUCTION

Workplace conflict is an inescapable and common organizational phenomenon (Lalegani et al., 2019; Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2019, 2018; Shaukat et al., 2017; Rahim, 2015; Riaz & Junaid, 2011). However, to exhibit that workplace is cordial employees and management rebuts its presence most of the time (Mikkelsen, 2013). Workplace conflict is being studied from different disciplinary lenses, now it is also a major theme of organizational behaviors, occupational and social psychology (Society for Human Resource Management, 2022; Rahim, 2015; De Dreu, 2008). Research regarding conflict emergence remained primarily focused on for-profit and public sectors (Lalegani et al., 2019; Chang, 2018a, 2018b; Rao, 2017; Rahim, 2015; Luthans, 2011; Wang, 2010; Brooks, 2009; Cunliffe, 2008; McAdam, 1996) but there is a dearth in non-for-profit or NGOs sector (Faith & Blessing, 2018; Faith, 2016) Similarly, the strategies adopted for the management of conflict in NGOs are not examined as well. This study aims to investigate the causes of conflict and its management strategies in the NGO sector.

Since 1945, Non-Government Organizations – NGOs as a third sector, are trying to fill the gap resulted due to the state's failure in fulfilling the developmental and livelihood needs of the society (Ghani & Ghani, 2021). Since its inception, NGOs are present in Pakistan. However, during the Cold War International NGOs role increased manifolds across the country. But in the northern part i.e., Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan, NGOs presence and operations grew phenomenally in the wake of the USSR-Afghanistan Saga in the 1980s, War-on-Terror and subsequent displacement of the population of the affected areas in the 2000s (Kahlon, 2015), 2005 catastrophic Earthquake, devastating floods in 2010 and General Musharraf Enlightenment Drive (Malik & Rana, 2020; Zaidi, 2008). However, working for NGOs in this region proved to be challenging for NGOs as they were considered more “*smiling western invaders*” than “*angels of mercy*” due to the region's complex social fabric, governance issues, and geopolitical dynamics (Jamal & Baldwin, 2019). These contextual complexities, socially constructed intrigues, and conspiracies made the NGOs workplace tough and hard to work. Subsequently, NGOs' employees faced a lot of problems in the workplace, one such is workplace conflict which remains unexamined. Therefore, there is a dire need for an exploratory examination of the causes of workplace conflict in the NGOs of this region along with strategies utilized for conflict management, this study aims for the same by utilizing critical realist qualitative methodology. The remainder of the paper is a review of the literature on the causes of workplace conflict and the need for managing conflict which is followed by the methodology of the study. Afterward, results that emerged from the examination of

phenomena are presented, debated, and situated in literature in the discussion section. Subsequently, the study is concluded along with reflecting upon the limitation of the study and future directions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

CAUSES OF WORKPLACE CONFLICT

Conflict has as many definitions as there are occasions for its occurrence (Tjosvold, 2008a). Some (Fisher, 1997; Kolb & Putnam, 1992; Thomas, 1992) opined that conflict exists when there are perceived differences in interests, views, or goals. It is suggested that when one party behaves in such a way that interferes with the objectives and aims of other parties, conflict results (Rahim, 2015). Moreover, Pelled, Eisenhardt, and Xin (1999) and Walton and Dutton (1969) defined conflict in terms of inconsistent claims to resources. Lalegani et al. (2019) while reviewing the definitions of conflict; define conflict as *“the process of opposition, inconsistency or disagreement in social institutions (individuals, groups or organizations) that arises from the perceived or actual contradiction between their interests, their goals or their actions”* (p. 1128). However, still, the varieties of definitions lead to the agreement with Tjosvold's (2008) conclusion that we need more conflict regarding conflict research. Summarizing these definitions, this study defines conflict as *“a state of dissonance or disagreement caused by the actual or perceived opposition of needs, values, and interests between people working together”*.

Conflict is categorized into different types on the bases of its genealogy (Mikkelsen & Clegg, 2019) such as relations, tasks, goals to achieve, values, and so on, and thus, some researchers hold these are distinct types of conflict that are countered by Mikkelsen and Clegg (2019) who are of the opinion that these types are overlapping, not mutually exclusive and socially constructed. This study, though critical realist i.e., objectivist ontology and subjectivist epistemology, holds that *“conflict is a process”* resulting due to a generative mechanism that needs to be investigated.

This exploratory study aims to examine the causes of workplace conflict in NGOs which are primarily intrapersonal, role conflict, and interpersonal conflict. The causes of intra-personal conflict stem from organizational structure, division of work and duties (Rahim, 2015; Schermerhorn et al., 2010), and task structure (Jehn et al., 1999), these, in turn, play role in conflicting goals, policies, and decisions (Rahim, 2015; Riaz & Junaid, 2012). These causes include inappropriate assignment of responsibilities, goal in-congruence, and inappropriate demand on capacity (Morris, Steers, & Koch, 1979; Rizzo et al., 1970).

Interpersonal conflict is of immense importance in organizational studies, and it is the most debated and researched type of four levels of conflict (Lalegani et al., 2019; Rahim, 2015) and that's why there is a dire need for investigating its causes (Olaniran, 2010). Attribution Theory (Kelley, 1967) posits that individuals tend to refer to others' behaviors as their characteristics such as individuals' attitudes, personality dimensions, motivation, intelligence, and ability (Lalegani et al., 2019). Whetten (2011) and Whetten, Cameron, and Woods (2000) furthered this argument and opine that there are four key causes of interpersonal conflict (Luthans, 2011) which are (i) personal differences, (ii) information asymmetry, (iii) role incongruity, and (iv) environmental stresses. Taking the same line, Rao (2017) concludes that causes of conflict include information deficiency, personality clash, role ambiguities, scarce resources, and stresses. Similar causes of conflict are identified by other researchers as well. For example, lack of resources, interdependencies, differences in organizational status, incongruent goals, more formalized and departmentalized structure, cultural orientations, lack of coordination, incoherence, inequitable compensation, non-transparent rewards, scarce resources, and personality differences (Schermerhorn et al., 2010; Wang, 2010; Brooks, 2009; Cunliffe, 2008). Collegial interpersonal conflict is significantly related to personal outcomes, for example, self-esteem, general well-being, and emotional exhaustion (McEwen, 1998). Contrarily, upward interpersonal conflict is related to organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover intentions, and real turnover. Anchoring upon Social Cognition Theory (SCT; Bandura, 1986), Self-Categorization Theory (SCT; Tajfel, 1981), and Similarity – Attractiveness Prospective (Byrne, 1971), it can be safely argued that interpersonal conflicts arise from social identity issues like prejudice towards out-group, feeling of superiority, and a hidden inclination of serving in-group at the expense of out-group(s) (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008). Correspondingly, Spector's (1998) emotion-centered model of job stress postulate that job stressors bring out emotional reactions and subsequent strains which lead to interpersonal conflict.

The discussion leads to the conclusion that the causes of workplace conflict are thoroughly examined in the for-profit and public sectors but not in the not-for-profit sector (Faith & Blessing, 2018). Furthermore, causes of conflict are investigated as linear causes of conflict, their interplay and interconnectedness are ignored. Therefore, the study objective is to explore such causes in NGOs with their interconnectedness, thus it postulated the following research question.

RQ1: What causes conflict in the NGO sector and how?

MANAGING WORKPLACE CONFLICT

Mismanaged and unresolved workplace conflict has dire consequences (Rahim, 2015; Freres, 2013; Riaz & Junaid, 2011; Chung-Yan & Moeller, 2010; Spector & Bruk-Lee, 2008; De Dreu & Beersma, 2005; Fox, Russo, Bowles, & Dutton, 2001; Spector & Jex, 1998). Experiencing conflict in the workplace is increasing. As reported by Workfront 2016-17 USA (Workfront, 2017) mentioned that in 2016, 95% of employees in the US experienced conflict as compared to 81% in 2016. According to CPP Global Human Capital Report (Certified Psychologists Press, 2008), on average a US employee spent 2.8 hours per week managing conflicts. This means a cost of \$359 billion per year to the economy. These eye-opening findings demand a strong urge to study workplace conflict and its proper and optimal management. Similarly, managers also spent time managing conflicts which is affecting the productivity of the organization (Buss, 2011). Employees who are affectees of workplace conflict spread bad word about the organization and thus affect its image (Pearson, 2010).

Mismanaged conflicts may result in absenteeism (Freres, 2013; Riaz & Junaid, 2011) since it affects employees' physical and psychological well-being negatively. Employees may come to their workplace due to organizational policies but due to conflict, they may exhibit presenteeism – being physically but absent psychologically (Buss, 2011; Riaz & Junaid, 2011). Though the cost of absenteeism due to conflict is studied at length, the cost of presentism due to conflict did not get that much attention from researchers. It is, therefore, an unexplored area for future researchers. Conflict may also result in the intention to quit (Rahim, 2015), actual and voluntary turnover (Freres, 2013; Buss, 2011; Dana, 2006; Duxbury & Higgins, 2003; Dana, 2001). Employees also suffered psychologically due to conflict in terms of induced stress, low level of self-confidence, increased anxiety, and frustration. Consequently, these may result in feelings of indignity, lower job satisfaction, low organizational commitment, lack of job involvement, intention to quit, indecisiveness, work withdrawal, and even in work deviant behaviors (Rahim, 2015; Freres, 2013; Buss, 2011; Riaz & Junaid, 2011).

Conflict management means the methods, tools, and techniques of dealing with conflict in terms of finding alternatives (Maiti & Choi, 2021) and adopting one best feasible alternative as per the contextual needs. Mostly, conflict management strategies and styles are used interchangeably which is not the case, as the conflict management styles are one's specific ways of dealing with conflict in a given context (Rahim, 2015) while conflict management strategy is the whole process of dealing the conflict by involving parties to the conflict. This study, therefore, aims to investigate the strategies adopted by the NGO personnel to deal with conflict that unsolved and mismanaged workplace conflict may affect the organization,

employees as well as other stakeholders of the organization including customers. The following research question is formulated to cater to this objective.

RQ2: What conflict management strategies do they use when they use them, and why?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As per the nature and type of research questions formulated and the philosophical orientation of the researchers (Saunders et al., 2019; Guba & Lincoln (1994), this study demands a qualitative methodology from a Critical Realist worldview and case study as the unit of collection and analysis as Yin (2018) posited that a case study is a good option when research questions aimed at exploration. Though causal relationships are mostly examined quantitatively using Humean regularities theory (Hildebrand, 2020), researchers do use qualitative methods to unearth the causal relationship between phenomena such as Jensen (2022). Similarly, the critical realist approach does advocate causation in terms of contextual generative mechanisms (Vincent & O'Mahoney, 2018). This study is a critical realist and positions itself critical realist qualitative study.

TARGET POPULATION AND SAMPLING

NGOs working on soft projects i.e., advocacy, capacity building, and awareness in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were the target population. As per Yin's (2018) typology, this study adopted multiple embedded case study methodology and the '*individual' employee*' of the NGOs is dealt with as a "*case*" because conflict is an idiosyncratic phenomenon. The final sample of eleven (11) cases was identified through purpose sampling considering the guidelines of Saunders et al., (2019) and Yin (2018).

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Semi-structured interviews aimed to get a rich account of the phenomena under study (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019), therefore, this study utilized the semi-structured interview as a data collection tool. A list of initial questions for the interview schedule was developed with the help of the literature view. During interviews, emergent questions were also asked. After nine interviews, it was concluded that saturation point is reached but as a precautionary measure two more interviews were conducted and it is found that no new significant information is coming out. Interviews ranged from 45 to 80 minutes (an average of 61 minutes). Interviews conducted were not recorded interviewees did not consent to it; therefore, notes were taken along with mind-mapping during interviews which helped in the transcribing interviews. Those transcriptions were vetted and validated by the interviewees

which were examined with the help of Leximancer – a machine learning-based Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) initially for investigating the relationship between themes/concepts (Smith, 2021) and then analyzed manually with the help of MindManager – a mapping software to develop a detailed causal map – a type of cognitive mapping used to depict cause-effect relations. It helps in understating a phenomenon using points (concepts) and causal links represented by arrows (Oliveira, 2020; Siau & Tan, 2006).

RESULTS

DEMOGRAPHICS

11 personnel from NGOs working on soft projects (advocacy, capacity building/ training, awareness, etc.) were interviewed thoroughly, among them, 4 were females and 7 were males with an average experience of 4.6 years. Concerning the nature of NGOs, 2 interviewees were from international NGOs, 4 from national NGOs, and 5 from local NGOs. 5 were working in advocacy projects, 3 in women's rights projects, and 3 in capacity building projects.

CAUSES OF WORKPLACE CONFLICT

The data collected from interviewees are cleaned and then analyzed using Leximancer. Initially, transcripts were analyzed for causes of conflict, figure 01 presented the relational concept maps. Subsequently, for an overall and detailed examination of causes and emergence of workplace conflict process, analysis is carried out through developing causal mapping utilizing MindManager (see figure 02).

The Leximancer produced two relational concept maps as presented in figure 01 informed about the emergence of the following themes.

- i. Resources** – refers to scarcity and distribution of project and organizational resources. It is a direct as well as an indirect cause of the conflict.
- ii. Promises** – refers to the promises of both tangible and intangible types broken and breached by organizations that are causing conflict in the workplace. The concepts of this theme are related to team composition, work environment, resource allocation, and scarcity.
- iii. Conflict** – refers to the incompatibility or incongruence of opinions, world views, personalities, etc. within employees or between employees and the organization's agents i.e., managers.
- iv. Personal** – refers to the ethnic, cultural, and personal attributes (like educational, professional background, etc.) driven diversity-based personal

differences which usually result in relationship conflict and sometimes task and process conflict as well.

- v. **Feelings** – refers to feelings of being breached and betrayed and broken with regards to promises made by the organization.
- vi. **Differences** – refer to those differences which the team members have about the course of action content and flow i.e. what to do and how to do it, and which are based on their understanding of the phenomenon at hand, not on their diversity-driven differences.
- vii. **happen** – refers to the process of happening in different instances which leads to workplace conflict.

Based on these relational concept maps, a detailed causal map is developed with the help of a thorough examination of the interviews' transcripts with the help of MindManager which is then explicated at length to understand the emergence of workplace conflict in project teams.

The detailed causal map (see figure 02) describes the emergence of task/process conflict and relationship conflict. The emergence of workplace conflict is not a linear process rather it is complex and includes some intermediary phenomena in developing the causes which in turn leads to conflict.

Starting with task/process conflict causes, autocratic management style which is also evident from the non-involvement of project employees in relevant decision making is causing task or process conflict. Similarly, dispositional differences resulted in differences of opinion which led to the emergence of task and process conflict, as one of the interviewees opined;

.... Though it's an NGO of repute but the managers are so dictatorial in their dealing and decision-making. They don't bother to ask us about how the thing shall be done, how to handle the situation whenever there is some problem. They don't ask for our opinion in taking a decision rather they impose things on us.

Resource scarcity and distribution issues contributed to the genesis task and process conflict. This scarcity and distribution of resources may have resulted from illogical demands of those employees whose feelings are disturbed by the actions of organizational agents, as one described it as

...when you are not provided things which are promised to you, and the senior staff at the provincial or national office even, demands much work and effort and time for the project, one has to be conflicting in response. As I have told that I also usually have conflicts with our senior staff over non-availability or scarcity of required resources, improper communication, ignoring the ground realities of our area, and some dispositional differences with one/two managerial staff as they got the resources, perks, and privileges based on our fieldwork but not letting us benefit. These happenings lead to having conflicting arguments with them, holding nearly opposite opinions about the tactical plans.

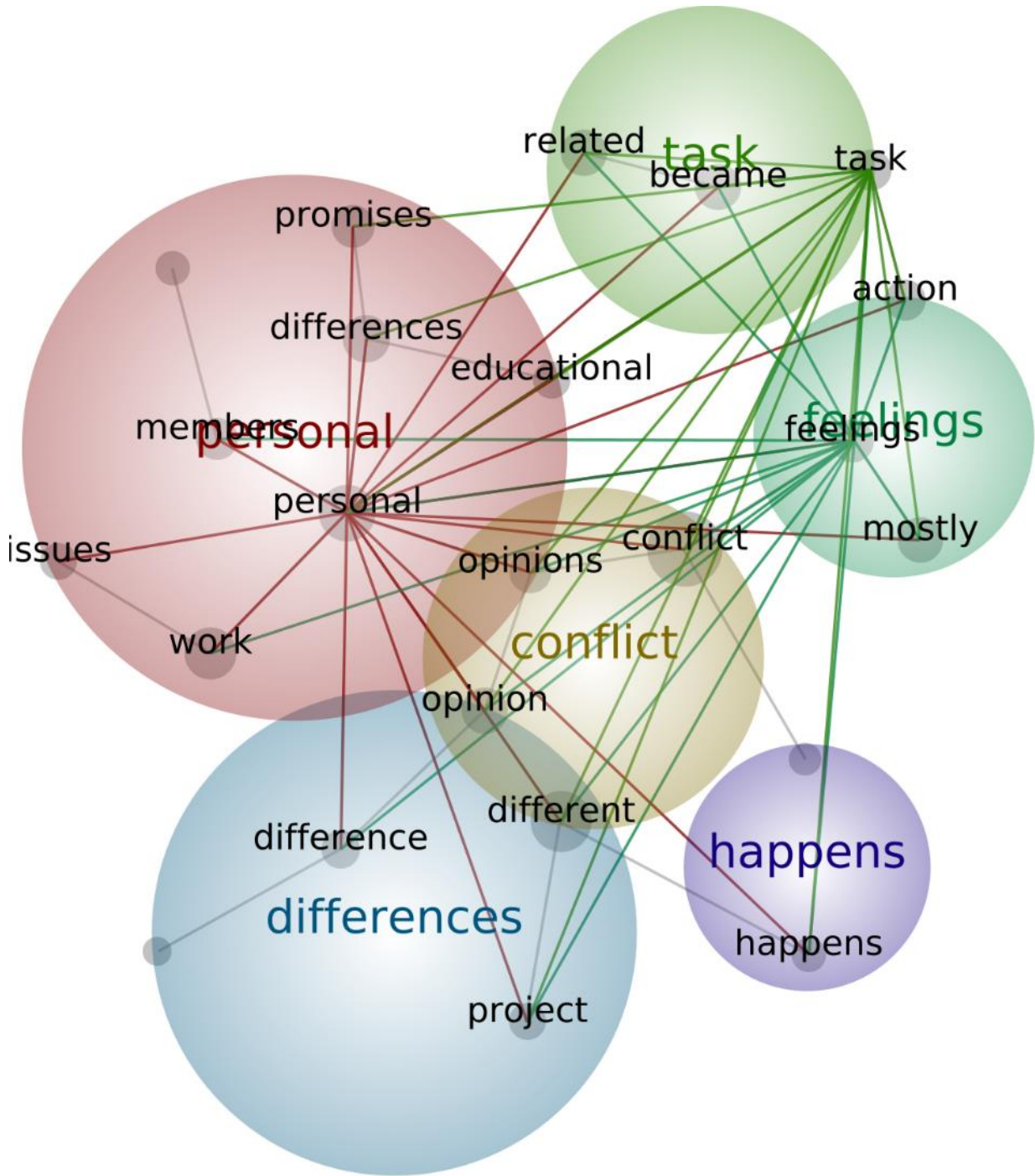


Figure 01: Detailed Relational Concept Maps of Causes of Conflict

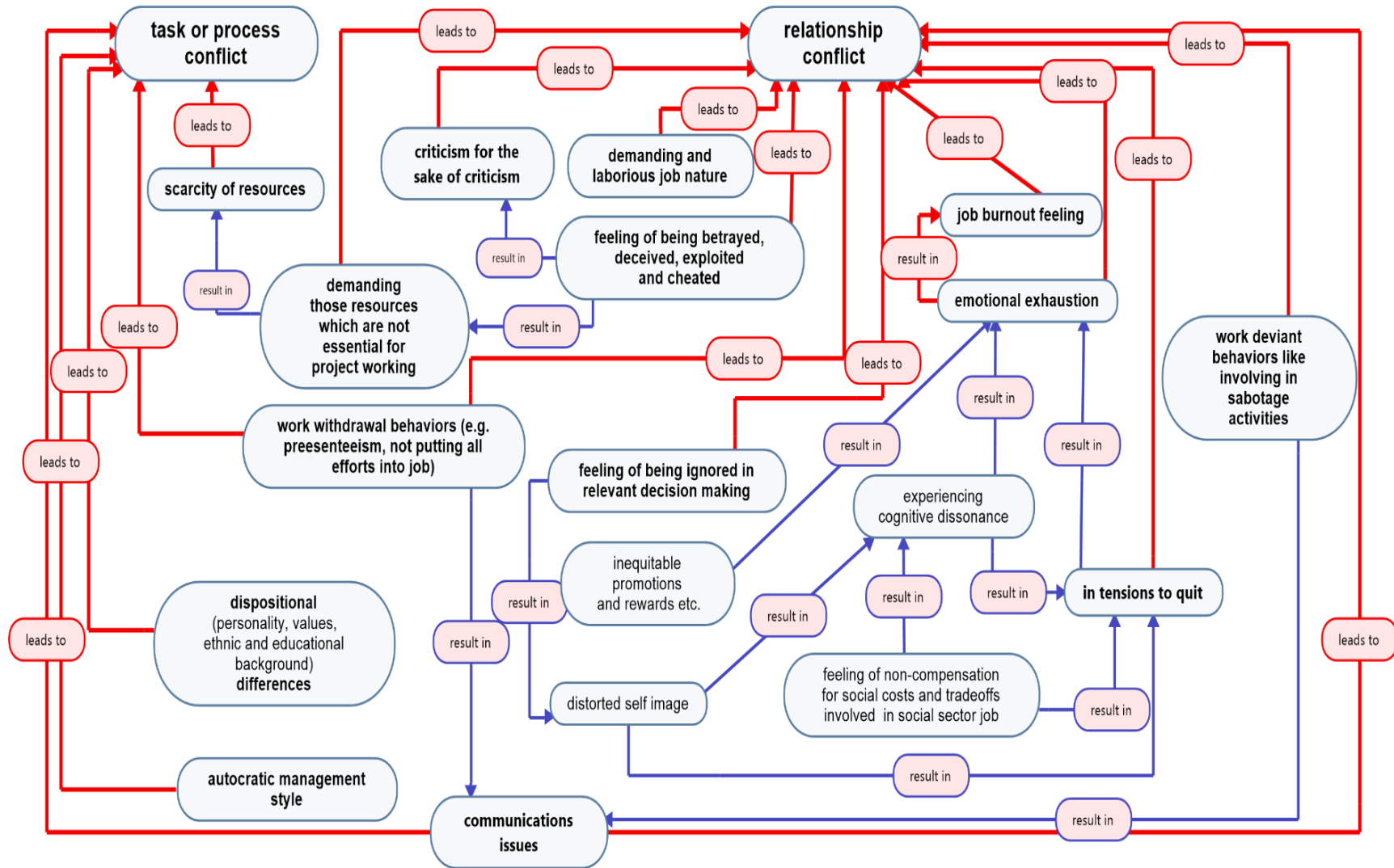


Figure 02: Detailed Causal Maps of Causes and Emergence of Conflict

Those employees who felt ignored and betrayed, start showing conflicting behaviors nonsensically, as one such employee argued that...

.... the betrayed members start behaving in conflicting ways i.e. augmenting, critiquing for the sake of criticism, and asking for even those resources which are not key for the project activities.

Communication issues resulted from two main phenomena at work. Firstly, work-withdrawal behaviors (which is also a direct cause of task and process conflict) include putting fewer efforts into the job and practicing presenteeism as one employee narrated,

.... I started putting less effort and doing only those things which are observable and the main responsibility of my job. Sometimes, I linger on the work because I didn't feel attached to the job.

Secondly, intentions to quit and switch to another organization are intensified in the employees when they felt cognitive dissonance due to different issues, which in turn is resulted from the distorted self-image of those employees who felt that they are ignored in their relevant decision making, not given compensation for bearing the social costs and trade-offs attached to NGO sector's job which is also a direct cause of intentions to quit. Here it can be observed that the causality is non-linear rather its complex and somehow cyclic or iterative. Communication is consequentially proven to be the cause of task and process conflict on one side and of relationship conflict on the other side, as the following excerpt from the interview indicated.

.... I am so disappointed and feel devalued as I am not even involved in my job's relevant decision-making. Reproductive health awareness is a much sensitive domain of social sector working and here you are ignored and neither supported nor compensated for social costs and trade-offs, then you will be having conflicting opinions and will be argumentative towards top management and less supportive of to own colleagues even.

When employees think that they are not given those things, facilities, etc. which are, as per their perception, promised to them then their feelings and cognitions are badly affected. The demanding, laborious, and long-hours nature of the job impacted the well-being of employees, they indulged in relationship conflict with managers and peers even. On the same account, feelings of betrayal, being deceived, and being cheated by the management also directly resulted in relationship conflict. It induced criticism for the sake of criticism as well which escalated the relationship conflict, as one interviewee pointed to.

.... Our project is different i.e. mobilizing the community for certain issues and that's why jobs here are laborious and demanding which are not simply of that simple 9-5 timing. Thus, team members became vulnerable to conflict. In my team I, myself have conflicts with senior management similarly my teammates have conflicts among themselves due for many reasons.

Additionally, it agitated the broken employees to demand those resources which are not essential for the project working which, in turn, contributed to relationship conflict emergence

and made the distribution of the resources more difficult which resulted in task and process conflict escalation. Furthermore, the feeling of being ignored in relevant decision-making also caused relationship conflict as one employee maintained that

...within my team, those who felt the broken promises with intensity, are not putting their best in their jobs but rather obstructing others, and some even have developed some personal grudges while others sometimes do their work half-heartedly.

Emotional exhaustion is one of the main direct as well as indirect causes of relationship conflict. Its development is contributed by intentions to quit (also a direct cause of relationship conflict) which itself resulted from experiencing cognitive dissonance (a direct contributor of emotional exhaustion) and which is impacted by distorted self-image (which is resulted from the feelings of being ignored in relevant decision making etc.), feeling of non-compensation for social costs and trade-offs, and inequitable promotions and rewards opportunities provision. This emotional exhaustion then contributed to job burnout which is a direct cause of relationship conflict.

...in our project, those who felt betrayed, ignored, and breached promises, became exhausted and they usually try to convert all types of conflict into personal or you can say feeling-based conflict [relationship conflict] with management or with some peers. They want to switch the organization if got an opportunity even with the same pay and perks as they start thinking negatively of their selves and the people around them. To be honest, I am exhausted too and now I want to switch as I have conflicts with the management as well.

Work deviant behaviors are the most undesired behaviors at work for any organization. The breach also influenced the employees to indulge in such unwelcoming behaviors which directly and indirectly (by contributing to developing communication issues) incited relationship conflict as one NGO employee asserted,

...in such instances when managers demand more work and putting more efforts and time to attain the project objectives, affected members start behaving harmfully. They indulged in sabotage activities, augmenting, critiquing for the sake of criticism, asking for even those resources which are not key for the project activities, etc. Within my team and our office, such hurt members, are not giving their best in their jobs but rather barricading others, and some even have developed some resentments of personal nature while others show that they are working but actually i.e. looking busy doing nothing.

Another employee concurs with the above opinion as narrated that,

...and those project team members who are deeply hurt by management's non-accommodating and not honoring perceived promises, sometimes indulge in sabotage activities. They start impeding the project work in many ways, for example, refusing or delaying the provision of information or some other resource, impacting the flow of work by unnecessarily objecting to it.

Here, it can be seen from the discussion on causes of conflict that these are not causing the conflict in linearity and isolation but interconnectedly and as an interplay of all or some of these causes which are that's why examining the causes of conflict in linearity may mislead the research.

STRATEGIES ADOPTED FOR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

The qualitative data related to strategies used for managing conflict is analyzed and the findings are presented pictorially with the help of MindManager in Figure 03. Though the identified strategies are three but these three are not mutually exclusive rather they are overlapping.

In the first strategy, the manager, or any employee with a formal or informal supervisory role looks for cues and hints to identify the conflict. During meetings and interactions, if he or she finds any such cue or hint in the form of useless argumentation, then start analyzing the situation and identified the parties involved. Then he listens to the parties in person and at one time as they deemed appropriate. Subsequently, he presents his version of the situation/conflict. Afterward, he tries to accommodate if there is any, the solution is then presented in final shape as one interviewee asserted,

Our immediate manager tried to manage the conflict informally as there are no organizational guidelines for resolving conflict. He mostly investigates the issue by himself, listens to the parties involved, and comes up with a solution acceptable to both parties.

If the parties accepted the solution, the conflict is managed properly. If the solution is not accepted then the supervisor usually takes one of these two steps either reshuffle the tasks, roles, and responsibilities of all or some parties or bring this conflicting situation to the notice of top management.

The second strategy starts with a deliberation on the subject matter i.e. what the conflict is all about. Then the person in the supervisory role categorizes the conflict either as task conflict or relationship conflict. In case of task conflict, he digs out the issue while in case of relationship conflict, he investigates to know the nitty-gritty of the differences (personality, values, ethnicity, professional) of the parties involved. After that in both task and relationship conflict, he tries to pacify and normalize the situation between conflicting parties and subsequently presents an accommodating solution, as one interviewee who was in a supervisory role, explain that

As I am head of my team within the project, for conflict resolution, tries to get into details of the conflict. I tried to find out the key issue. I also consider the background of my team members in terms of their area [ethnic background], professional background, etc. because these things also matter. Then I come up with a win-win solution to calm down the situation and parties, which may be the in the shape of relocating the members or their tasks.

The solution acceptance leads to proper management of conflict else the supervisor either reshuffles the tasks, roles, and responsibilities of all or some parties or brings this conflicting situation to the notice of top management. In these cases, the conflict remains unmanaged which creates a lot of hurdles for the conflicting parties, their peers, the project, and the organization.

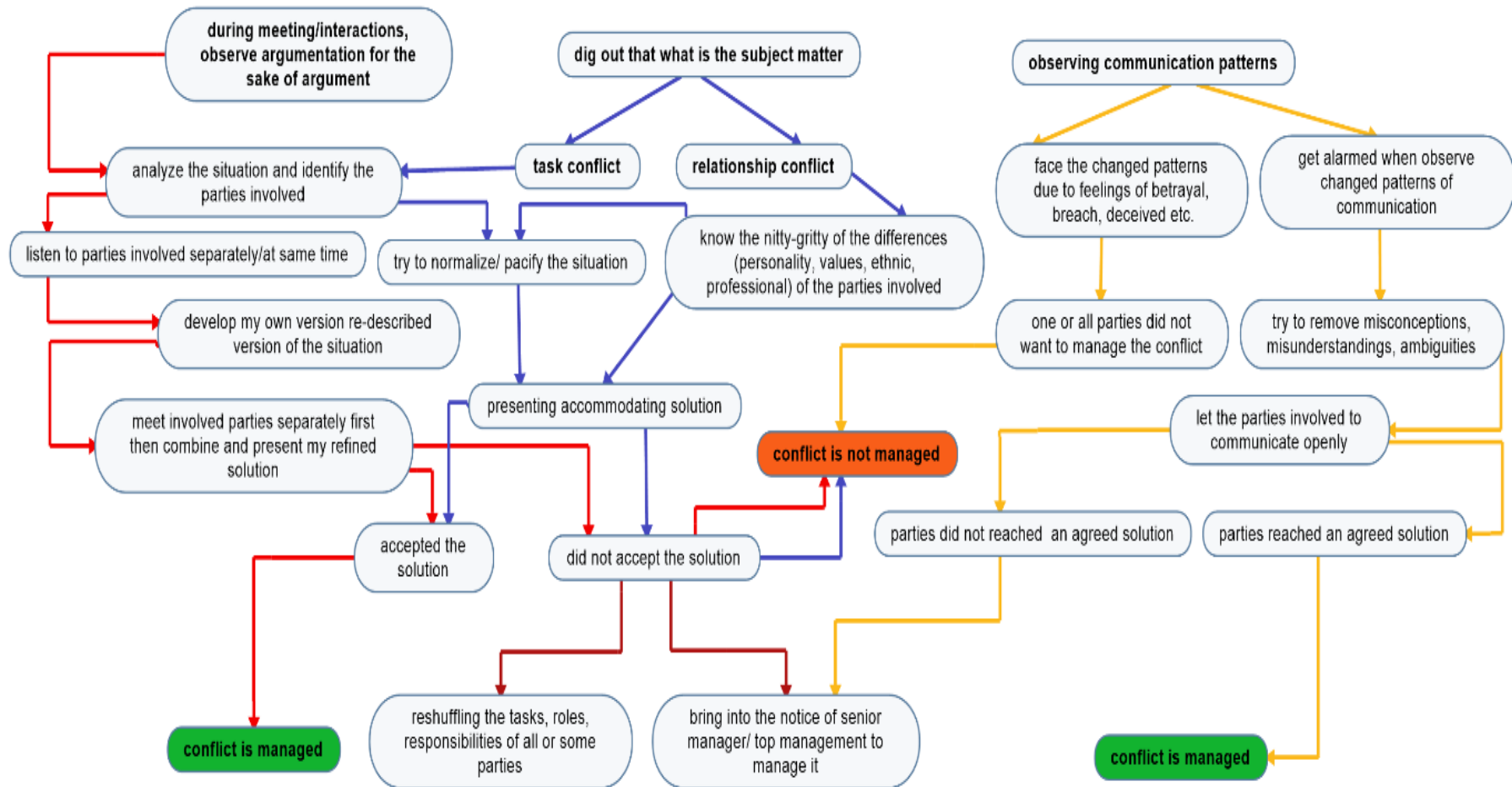


Figure 03: Strategies adopted for Management of Workplace Conflict

In the third strategy, the supervisor observes the communication patterns. If he notices a changed pattern of communication, he gets alarmed. These changing patterns are usually of two types i.e. generic and due to feelings of betrayal and breach. In generic conflict, he then tries to remove the misconceptions, misunderstandings, and ambiguities about the issue at hand between conflicting parties. He also provides opportunities to the conflicting parties to communicate with one another freely and openly as one interviewee explicated the process as

I have worked in another NGO where my boss (who was having communication background), use to tell us most of the disputes occur due to communication problems. So, I follow her in managing the conflict. I tried to investigate the issue from a communication perspective is there any misunderstanding, hearsay, third-party involvement, etc? I try to remove and let the parties communicate freely without any interruption or disruption. Most disputes are solved in this way.

In most cases, parties reach an agreement and thus conflict is managed successfully. In some cases, if the parties did not reach an agreement, then the issue is brought to the notice of top management for further necessary action. In case of breach feeling driven conflict, one or all concerned parties did not want to pacify the situation and get the conflict managed, so conflict remains unmanaged which has negative consequences for all including the parties involved, their colleagues, the project, and the organization.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study investigated the causes of workplace conflict in NGOs. Most of the causes are in line with the literature regarding the for-profit and public sectors. Task and process conflict in NGOs result due to the autocratic management style (Rahim, 2015; Luthans, 2011), dispositional differences (Lalegani et al., 2019; Schermerhorn et al., 2010; Wang, 2010; Brooks, 2009; Cunliffe, 2008) resources scarcity and distribution issues (Rao, 2017; Nguyen & Yang, 2012), communication problems (Rao, 2017; Rahim, 2015), intention to quit (Medina et al, 2005). Similarly, relationship conflict emerged due to emotional exhaustion (Rahim, 2015; McEwen, 1998), lesser psychological well-being (Medina et al, 2005), and non-supportive organizational culture (Schermerhorn et al., 2010; Brooks, 2009; Cunliffe, 2008), induced stress (Luthans, 2011), work withdrawal and work deviant behaviors (Lalegani et al., 2019). But these causes did not functionalize linearly as suggested by positivist quantitative studies rather there is a very complex web of phenomena whose interplay non-linearly results in the emergence of workplace conflict such as in this study, the feeling that the organization did not provide what it has promised, non-involvement in relevant decision making, laborious and demanding job nature in NGOs corroborated by non-supportive organizational culture, affected psychological wellbeing. Likewise, the distorted self-image results because of ignoring the employees' say, involvement, and non-considerate attitude of organizational

agents (managers), coupled with non-compensation for social trade-offs faced due to NGOs' employment nature, develop cognitive dissonance which in turn affects the intentions to quit and actual switching. It is, therefore, concluded that the emergence of workplace conflict in NGOs is not a linear process rather it is a complex, non-linear, and interlinked process.

The study also examined the conflict management strategies adopted as Enehaug, Helmersen and Mamelund (2016) argued that conflict shall be taken seriously in the beginning otherwise it paralyzes the organization. It was found that there are three such overlapping strategies which are not formal and documented but informal and anchored in traditions. Employees with some supervisory roles take the lead and assist conflicting parties to manage their conflict by providing them opportunities for open communication, pacifying the situation, and offering non-partisan redescription of the situation. These strategies are helpful to some extent inter-employee conflicts but not in those where one party is the organization agent. These conflicts remain unmanaged which affected the organizational culture, functioning, and productivity.

STUDY'S CONTRIBUTION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The study contributed to the body of knowledge and practitioners kit as well. There is a dearth of research on workplace conflict in NGOs in terms of examining its emergence as corporate and the public sector remain in focus but not the social sector. This study not only examined the causes of conflict in NGOs but also investigated the underlying mechanism through the interplay and interconnectedness of these causes and concluded that conflict emergence is not a linear process but a complex, iterative and interlinked one. Firstly, this study calls for a mixed method examination of causes of conflict in NGOs keeping the context into consideration with the utmost rigor and triangulation and suggesting a generative mechanism through retroductive reasoning. Secondly, context is of key importance while the majority of the organizational studies are conducted in the northern part of the globe with exception of China. There is a dire need for the investigation of organizational phenomena in the global south particularly the gulf region, South Asia and Southeast Asia, and Africa where NGOs are working extensively. Thirdly, the workplace conflict in NGOs may be studied concerning other organizational phenomena like the psychological contract, work deviant behaviors, employees' psychopathic inclinations, incivility, servant and authentic leadership. Practitioners may investigate the conflict in the workplace from a holistic perspective not ignoring the underlying unearthed complex interplay of different organizational phenomena. Secondly, they may also consider the intervening contextual, cultural, and organizational fabric. Finally, the use of coercive measures may be avoided.

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