

# Understanding and Managing Conflict

Diin Fitri

TANRI ABENG UNIVERSITY

Email: diin.fitri@tau.ac.id

Diterima: 6 Maret 2018

Disetujui: 13 Maret 2018

## Abstract

*Conflict is normal phenomena in organizations. It is part of organization life. It shows that organization is healthy when there are conflicts until one point as it shows the process of changing and learning. Thus, it will be beneficial for the organizations to understand the source, type of conflict and be able to manage conflicts. This is a qualitative research based on literature review to find the source, type of conflict and to provide practical guidelines on how to manage conflict. It is found that that several sources of conflict such as communication, cultural diversity and unmet expectation and needs. Previous researchers classified conflicts into different terms such as structure, process and tasks, and conflict into individual, intergroup and process conflict. Some practical guidelines were also provided, but communication is a major point.*

**Keyword:** *Conflict, managing conflict, type of conflict*

## Introduction

Any organization has its own vision and missions. People in the organization is working together to achieve those vision. As each individual whom comes from different background and characteristic working together, the potency of conflict is unavoidable and become part of organizations. Furthermore, as development of global economic and technology where the boundaries between nation are reduced, diversity in workplace are increased and virtual communication becomes common. Thus, it makes the possibility of conflict is higher. However, it is important to understand that not all conflict is negative for the organization. As conflict is a signal that there is learning process and idea sharing in the organization, then some conflict is beneficial. To maintain good work condition, it is necessary to manage the conflict in apt time other than assuming the conflict will disappear (Sadia & Berhannudin Mohd Salleh, 2017)

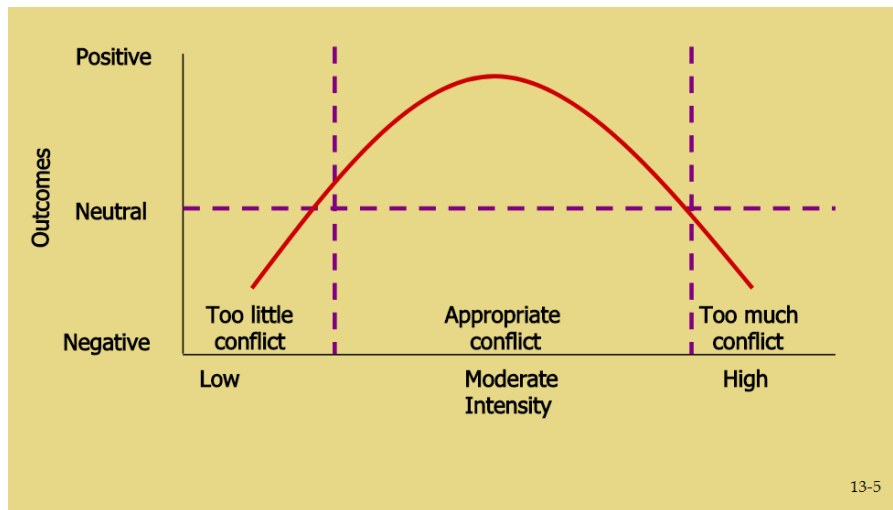
As conflict is unavoidable and may result positive or negative impact then it will be beneficial for the organizations to understand the conflicts so that the organization could be able to minimize the unnecessary conflict and to resolve conflict in order to have better outcomes to the company. This paper will explore the definition and concept or definition of conflict, source of conflict and tips how to manage workplace conflict based on previous research.

## Definition of Conflict

Conflict is the dispute between two or more persons or teams in which each party wants to the opposite person or team to accept his view (Thakore, 2013) (Sadia & Berhannudin Mohd Salleh, 2017). Other study define conflict as “perceived incompatibilities or discrepant views among the parties involved”. (Jehn & Bendersky, C., 2003). Conflict “*is a process in which one party perceive that its interest is being opposed or negatively affected by another party*’ (Kreitner & Kinicky, 2010).

There are different views on seeing conflict, traditional view sees conflict is unhealthy for the organization (Robin & P, 2005). On the other hand, human relation school view conflict is avoidable by building goodwill and trust in organization. Management should avoid conflict and settle the conflict as soon as possible (Thakore, 2013). Next, the inter actionist believes that conflict is good sign of healthy organization up to a point (Thakore, 2013). Conflict is important for group to perform well, without seeing as bad or good conflict (De Drue & Vliert, 1997). At the end, Kreitner & Kinicky (2010) conclude that some conflicts are functional when the conflict is constructive with a win-win attitude to support the organization achieve its goals. On the other hand, conflicts are dysfunctional if they are threatening organization interest.

As stated above that some conflicts are good until one point, Brown (1983) in Kreitner & Kinicky (2010) describe the relation of conflict intensity and outcomes as shown below:



**Figure 1.**  
**Conflict intensity and outcomes**

From above figure we can conclude that small conflict and high conflict will lead negative impact whereas the appropriate number of conflict will have better outcomes. At the end, organizations want the result of conflict is learning, agreement and stronger relationship.

## Antecedents of Conflicts

Several scholars have studied the source of conflicts, but in general there internal and external source of conflicts (Shaub, 2010). External source of conflict is when employee internal life bring conflict in workplace. The source of internal source is various however some are described in below:

1. Communication (Robin & P, 2005) (Kreitner & Kinicky, 2010) (Fowler, 2013).
2. Avoidance to resolve the conflict when it is small (Clifford, 2006). There are some reasons why people tends avoid conflicts such as fear of rejection, loss of relationship, being seen as selfish, hurting someone else, or intimacy.
3. Structural conflict (Robin & P, 2005) (Thakore, 2013) (Kreitner & Kinicky, 2010). Structural conflict arises when there is interdependency on doing task, overlapping job or high layer of structure. Furthermore, if the interdependency is unequal is also the source of conflict. (Kumar, et al., 1995).
4. Unmeet expectation and needs (Kreitner & Kinicky, 2010) (Cappozzoli, 1995)
5. Diverse culture (Cappozzoli, 1995) (Sadia & Berhannudin Mohd Salleh, 2017)
6. Different personalities, and perception on interpreting some information (Cappozzoli, 1995)
7. Flex office and combo office type (Danielsson, et al., 2015). The study aimed to know the influence of office design on workplace conflict. The sample were 5299 employees in the Swedish Longitudinal Occupational Survey of Health 2010 (SLOSH) that working in various type of office. As a result, flex office and combo office has significant impact on conflict. Flex-office is defined as no personal workstation and the office space is design for around 70% of the employee. On the other hand, combo office is the personal workstation can be in a room and in shared space. There are independent work and a high degree of team work.
8. Virtual and geographically distributed teams (Paul, et al., 2004a) (J.Hinds & Bailey, 2003). (Curs,eu, 2005) in (Remco de Jong, 2008) stated that most scholars approve that when teams depend on technology to communicate, then it could be called as virtual.

On the other hand, external source of conflict can be personal stress than the employee brings to office that might lead to workplace conflict (Fowler, 2013). The stress can be derived from work-home balance, economic motive and other personal issues. In addition, initial prejudice and generalization in race may lead to conflict (Shaub, 2010)

### **Type of Conflict**

Kreitner & Kinicky (2010) stated that there are three of types of conflict. First, personality conflict, it is a conflict that based on personal dislike, disagreement or different styles. This conflict often starts with insignificant irritation. Second type of conflict is intergroup conflict (Kreitner & Kinicky, 2010). It is defined as a conflict that arise between groups and this conflict is a common threat to organizations (Kreitner & Kinicky, 2010) . The third of type conflict mentioned by Kreitner & Kinicky (2010) is cross-cultural conflict, this conflict arises because cultural differences.

Study done by Thakore (2013) divides conflict into four categories. First, intrapersonal conflict. It is conflict between individuals. Second, intergroup conflict, the conflict that take place between members in different groups. Third, intragroup conflict, conflict between groups as a whole. Fourth, the interorganizational conflict, the conflict amongst the organization that may happen because several issues such as competition of merger and acquisition.

On the other hand, other studies classify conflicts into three categories; relationship, task and process conflict (Jenh & Mannix, E., 2001). (Myers & Larson, S., 2005). Fowler (2013) divided conflict into the reason conflict starts; the internal process such as task conflict, process conflict and relational conflict and where the conflict starts; internally, externally, and systematically conflict. Systematically conflict is the system in the

organization lead the employee to have conflict. For instance, the top management team decides the utilities such as electricity should be shutdown after formal office hours (5 PM), on the other hand, marketing department can only work after 5 pm as they might meet the clients in office hours.

Relationship conflicts is happening when the employees develop issues when working together to accomplish their job (Fowler, 2013). Task conflicts arise when the employees do not know how to do the tasks and there are confusions among the employee so they argue each other. (Fowler, 2013). Process conflicts are occurring when people argue the process they need to do in working together, and the fairness of the process (Myers & Larson, S., 2005).

**Managing Conflict**

Previous studies have suggested some guidance to resolve conflict. To manage personality conflict, organization might set up workplace etiquette training in order to equip all part of the organization skills to respect others, to learn how to give and respond of feedback (Kreitner & Kinicky, 2010). In addition, Kreitner & Kinicky (2010) suggests some tools to resolve the conflict. They suggested to communicate directly to settle the conflict and focus with the core problem not the personal issues. Employees are able to find solution with their superiors or human resource person. It also necessary not to take others into conflict. In addition, for the observer it also recommended not to take side, if possible recommended the parties to solve the conflict productive and positive systems. Alternatively, they may refer the problem to parties’ direct supervisor instead of doing nothing. For the managers, examine and verify the conflict, if necessary manager may take corrective action or take informal conflict resolution. Furthermore, referring the conflict to human resources or hiring counselor would also possible to resolve the conflict.

To solve intergroup conflict Kreitner & Kinicky (2010) has provided some suggestions. First, improve intra teams building and organize the cross-functional teamwork. Second, boost personal relationship or friendship among employees across their group. Third, adopt positive behavior and avoid gossiping other groups, if necessary neutralize the negative rumors. On the other hand, Kreitner & Kinicky (2010) also recommend to hire International consultant and to develop cross cultural relationship. Furthermore, Kreitner & Kinicky, 2010 also described the skills need to be improved to build cross cultural relationship as stated below :

Behavior	Rank
Be a good listener	1
Be sensitive to the needs of others	2
Be cooperative rather than overly competitive	2
Advocate inclusive (participative) leadership	3
Compromise rather than dominate	4
Build rapport through conversations	5
Be compassionate and understanding	6
Avoid conflict by emphasizing harmony	7
Nurture others (develop and mentor)	8

**Figure 2**

### **Ways to build cross-cultural relationship**

As shown above be a good listener is important point to improve cross cultural relationship, follows be sensitive and be cooperative. However, it also not suggested to avoid conflict in order to maintain harmony.

Thakore (2013) stated that people with re-act differently and use diverse strategy to manage conflict, there are two important concern to remember that people are achieving their own goals and maintaining good relationship with others. How people value each categories (goals and relationship) will affect how they manage conflict such avoiding, smoothing, forcing or confronting. In addition, Thakore (2013) recommends some methods to resolve structural conflict; decrease interdependency between groups, enlarge the resource so that people will not argue to acquire same resources, mutual problem solving and increase interaction among employee. Moreover, there are other possible methods to resolve conflict; bargaining and negotiation or using third party (Thakore, 2013). However, the willingness to share the information among the member is important to success the negotiation (Posthuma, 2011).

### **Conclusion**

Conflict is normal in organizations, it is part of organization life. It shows that organization is healthy when there are conflicts until one point as it shows the process of changing and learning. However, even it is normal, some conflicts are dangerous for the organizations for that reason, organizations should resolve conflicts as soon as possible. There some source of conflict such as communication, cultural diversity and unmet expectation and needs. Previous study classified conflicts to structure, process and tasks. Other study classified conflict into individual, intergroup and process conflict. To solve each kind of conflict there few tips that employees, managers and organizations can do. For example, communicating directly to resolve conflict, but with problem solving attitude, not with against thought or to improve team building. Furthermore, for the observer, not taking a side in essential and to recommend the parties to resolve the conflict in positive manner, if necessary suggest them to consult with higher level or Human Resource person. In addition, for the manager investigating and verify the conflict and provide corrective action if needed. One thing to be note that different kind of conflict will require different approach to solve it.

### **References**

- Cappozzoli, T. K., 1995. Resolving conflict within teams. *Journal for Quality and Participation.*, Volume 18n7, pp. 28-30..
- Clifford, S., 2006. *Until death or some other sticky situation do us part.* s.l.:Inc. Magazine.
- Curs,eu, P. a. W. I., 2005. Information processing in virtual teams: implications for virtual team effectiveness. In: *Complexity within Organizations.* s.l.:Pearson Education Limited.
- Danielsson, C. B., Bodin, L., Wuff, C. & Theorell, T., 2015. The office type's impact on workplace conflicts: A gender and noise perspective. *Journal of Environmental Psychology.*
- De Drue, C. & Vliert, V. d., 1997. *Using conflict in companies.* London: Sage Publication.
- Fowler, C., 2013. *Workplace Conflict : A Phenomenological Study of the types, process, and consequences of small business conflict* , s.l.: Pepperdine University Graduate School of Education and Psychology.
- J.Hinds, P. & Bailey, D. E., 2003. Out of Sight, Out of Sync: Understanding Conflict in Distributed Teams. *Organization Science*, 14(6), pp. 615-632.

- Jehn, K. & Bendersky, C., 2003. Intragroup conflict in organizations: a contingency perspective on the conflict-outcome relationship.. *Research in Organizational Behaviour*, 25(3), pp. 187-242.
- Jehn, K. & Mannix, E., 2001. The dynamic nature of conflict: A longitudinal study of intragroup conflict and group performance. *The Academy of Management*, 44(2), pp. 238-251.
- Kreitner, R. & Kinicky, A., 2010. Conflict . In: *Managing Conflict and Negotiation*. s.l.:s.n., p. 364.
- Kumar, N., Scheer L & Steenkamp J, 1995. The Effect of perceived interdependence on dealer attitudes. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 32(3), pp. 348-356.
- Myers, L. & Larson, S., 2005. Preparing students for early work conflict. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 68(3), pp. 306-317.
- Paul, S., Seetharaman, P., , Samarah, I. & Mykytyn, P.P., 2004a. An empirical investigation of collaborative conflict management style in group support system-based global virtual. *Journal of Information and Management Systems*, Volume 21, pp. 212-238.
- Posthuma, R. A., 2011. Introduction ; Conflict management and performance outcomes. *International Journal of Conflic Management*, 22(2), pp. 108-110.
- Remco de Jong, R. S. a. P. L. C., 2008. Virtual communicating, conflicts and performance in teams. *Team Performance Management*, 14(7/8), pp. 364-380.
- Robin & P, 2005. In: *Organisational Behaviour*. New Jersey: Pearson Education.
- Sadia, D. & Berhannudin Mohd Salleh, a. H. O., 2017. Exploring the Role of Culture in Communication Conflicts: A Qualitative Study. *The Qualitative Report*, Volume 22(4), pp. 186-1198.
- Shaub, J., 2010. *Presentation on Systems and Organizational Subsystems*. Washinton, s.n.
- Thakore, D. D., 2013. Conflict and Conflict Management. *Journal of Business and Management*, 8(6), pp. 07-16.