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CONFLICTS: THE EDUCATIONAL ASPECTS

Conflict is the arousal of two or more strong motives that cannot be solved together [1]. A conflict is a clash of interest. The basis of conflict may vary but it is always a part of society [2].

Conflict arises when one or more participants views the current system or relationship as not working! At least one party is so dissatisfied with the status quo, that he or she is willing to speak-up in hopes of improving the situation. It is no accident that we most often find ourselves in conflict with those with whom we spend the most time – family, friends, and colleagues. In addition to our closeness, we all have different perceptions of a situation and interpret our perceptions in terms of our sometimes different beliefs and values [3].

The phenomenon of conflict among humans is natural where two or more people may be together for some time. However, conflicts do not

occur in the same way in the working environment. Conflicts are attributed either to differences or disagreements in attitudes, needs, values, tasks, and interests, or to differences deriving from competition, ignorance, or the negative reactions of organizational members, etc. The potential for conflict is greater when there is a differentiation in goals, an interdependency of individuals' work or a high level of misunderstanding. Hence, conflict could occur anywhere, in any organization, and its implications for organizational performance are unavoidable.

Educational institutions are no an exception because conflicts in a living organization are inevitable and may occur among students, educators, as well as between the institution itself and local authorities or parents. Moreover, given that educational establishments belong to the service sector and the educators are pressed to achieve and maintain standards of performance to satisfy the desires and needs of the community and society in the best possible way, then it is reasonable to assume that there is an increased likelihood for conflicts to occur within educational institutions. In reality, conflict is a general phenomenon of educational life, it would be almost impossible to find an educational unit that is free of any conflict.

Education can be part of the problem as well as part of the solution. Policies and practice at all levels within the education system need to be analysed in terms of their potential to aggravate or ameliorate conflict [4].

Worldwide, the phenomenon of conflict in educational establishments has prompted to identify the following sources of conflicts in educational settings: lack of cohesion among educators, lack of harmonious climate, ineffective patterns of communication and information sharing, limited material and financial resources, and individual differences in perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs.

According to the classical view, conflicts in an organization need to be an avoidance phenomenon due to their negative effect on the stability and the smooth functioning of an organization. In contrast, modern management views agree that the emergence of conflicts is a positive indicator of organizational performance that leads to better decision-making, evolution and effectiveness.

The positive impact of conflicts, such as the production of more creative ideas, the release of tension, or the clarification of goals, may actually improve the team's effectiveness. The negative impact of conflicts may otherwise lead to lack of communication, stress, or regular absences, that may decrease the levels of motivation and performance of staff and, subsequently, of students.

Conflict can be considered as a major problem in the fields of management and organizational behaviour, and much emphasis is placed on the fact that the effective management of conflicts in organizations, in education too, increases organizational creativity and productivity. Constructive and creative conflict management would serve to help the educational establishment achieve its aims and goals.

In general, conflicts in educational relationship are commonly represented by the following three types [5]:

Teacher-Teacher Conflict. Sources of conflict: differing values, opposing interests, personality conflicts, poor communication, personal problems.

Strategies to resolve conflict: encourage employees to be respectful and tolerable of differing views; remind teachers they are part of a team, and hold team-building activities to unite the staff; use clear, concise, accurate, and timely communication with fellow teachers; define a clear delegation of administrator's authority; prevent conflict by intervening in situation before it develops into a conflict; use conflict as a learning opportunity for team-building and leadership development.

Teacher-Student Conflict. Sources of conflict: power struggles, grades, discipline policies, personality conflicts, beliefs, backgrounds, problems or stress from home, anxiety, testing authority, showing favouritism.

Strategies to resolve conflict: plan parent-student-teacher meetings to discuss any problems or conflicts; build relationships that instil trust with one another, allowing for teachers, students, and parents to have open communication; set clear expectations in the classroom for both teacher and students; create a classroom community that is respectful and open to

opinions; practice scenarios in the classroom that will give the students solutions when it comes to conflicts in the classroom.

Student-Student Conflict. Sources of conflict: student's attempt to increase popularity or power, differing socio-economic backgrounds, gender, race, religion, disabilities, student's insecurities, family-life, rumours, social exclusions.

Strategies to resolve conflict: offer peer mediation to encourage students to solve their problems; set clear expectations for student conduct and conflict resolution; let students take the lead in resolving their conflicts, the teacher should not tell them how to resolve the conflict; hold daily discussions on friendships and bullying, this is especially important with young children; create a safe environment for students to discuss their conflicts; open door policy with educational counsellors; incorporate literature about conflict resolution into the curriculum.

The main aim of each educational unit is, among other things, to create and develop a climate within which all the different groups are able to cooperate effectively in order to achieve the educational aims. The harmonious cooperation within educational settings may be achieved if three conditions are satisfied, namely: a high degree of maturity on the part of education members; stable and well-structured duties; and a stable, energetic, and positive working environment.

The development of such a climate is not an easy task because the educational environment is a vulnerable one where the nature of the work is based mainly upon interpersonal relations and human behaviour. An understanding of the potential approaches and their consequences would certainly make it easier to develop a favourable working climate. Five main approaches of conflict management strategies have been commonly recognized [6].

Avoidance approach. This approach involves little concern for self and others and is a technique of conflict management strategy that promotes the postponement of a situation and avoids any discussion of the problem with the parties involved.

Compromise approach. In this approach the opposing parties maintain their differences while they are obliged to find a solution that is equally acceptable to both parties.

Collaboration or integration approach. According to this approach, the opposing parties with a favourable attitude develop the communication necessary to overcome any misunderstanding and to find the best possible solution. In addition, the approach must involve confrontation and open discussion of the problem if it is to succeed in generating innovative solutions and promoting justice and fairness, the two essential elements for effective teamwork.

Forcing or competing approach. In this approach, one entity uses force to solve the conflict among the parties involved. This approach has a binary, win-lose outcome and involves high concern for self and low concern for others.

Smoothing or accommodating approach. This approach primarily determines the situation of the conflict and analyses the nature and conditions in which the conflict occurred. Moreover, it involves little concern for self and more concern for others.

The choice of any approach depends not only on the type of conflict and the circumstances but also on the knowledge and the perception of the conflict managing style and the maturity of the parties involved. However, integrating and compromising approaches are the two styles most preferred by individuals when conflict occurs.

To sum up, there is a saying in the field of conflict resolution that “a problem well stated is a problem half solved”. The key is to recognize the essence of the concern and then state that issue as one for discussion in mutualizing, problem-solving terms.

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DANGERS AND RISKS: THE EDUCATIONAL ASPECTS

Danger, also risk or peril, is the possibility of something bad happening. A situation in which there is a risk of something bad happening, is called dangerous, risky or perilous [1]. In terms of health and safety management, the term “risk” may be defined as the most likely consequence of a hazard, combined with the likelihood or probability of it occurring [2].

Educational institutions are a minefield of health hazards, arguably one of the most dangerous possible places for children to be. Spending their days