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Exploring Types, Sources and Resolution of Communication Conflicts at the Workplace in Pakistan- A Qualitative Study

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Abstract
Occurring communication Conflict among employees at any workplace is a natural phenomenon. The concern, however, arises when the conflict entails into a destructive consequence rather than into a constructive one. This paper, therefore, intends to investigate the existence, types, sources and resolution of communication conflicts at the workplace in the developing sector in Pakistan. A qualitative research approach was used for the study. The data for the study, therefore, emerged from library research and the structured interviews taken from the eighteen employees belonging to the three development organizations namely CMDO, Read Foundation and ICMC from the area of Peshawar and Islamabad of Pakistan. The research used a purposeful sampling to derive sample for the study. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed through thematic analysis. The findings from this study show significant implications in conflict types and their resolution among employees in the developing organizations. In the light of findings of this study, it is crucial for the organizations to have some resolution mechanism and accountability at the workplace for the well-being of employees and organizations.
Keywords: communication conflicts, developing sector, workplace, conflict resolution

1. Introduction

This part of the larger Ph.D. studies reports an analysis of responses of eighteen employees regarding communication conflicts among employees at the workplace. All the employees were selected from three the developing organizations of Pakistan. The responses received from the employees were analyzed in the context of existing literature on workplace conflict in Pakistan. After conducting three days training on PBL approach, this quasi-experimental study carried out

the semi-structured interview. The interview schedule contained 6 questions that sought responses from the employees on various types; sources and effective resolution of communication conflicts (see Appendix 1 for the interview schedule). The study found wide similarities and as well as wide variations in what each of the employees responded to the types of communication conflict their causes and effective resolution at the workplace.

The aims of this study were to address the following questions;

- What types of communication conflicts exist among employees at the workplace?
- What causes triggering those communication conflicts among employees and
- How are they being or can be managed and resolved?

2. Review of Literature

With the passage of time, human beings have developed a complex and refined communication. Communication can be defined as the process of transmitting information and common understanding from one person to another (Beattie & Ellis, 2014). Communication has been subjected to numerous and diverse conceptualization, however, most definition agrees that communication is a transfer of transmission of ideas through words, feeling and behavior from one person to another; communication is not linear but a two way of communication (Beattie & Ellis, 2014). All type of communication is essential in building and maintaining relationships in the workplace. Once a memorandum, letter, fax, or e-mail has been sent, many are inclined to believe that communication has taken place. However, communication does not occur until information and understanding have passed between sender and the intended receiver.

The word "conflict" is perceived differently by different people. There is no agreed upon definition. We, therefore, put forth some of the definitions to have an idea about the term. According to Bochantin, Interaction of interdependent people who perceive incompatible goals, aims, and values and who see the other party's potentially interference with the realization of these 3 "Is" goals of Conflict: Interaction, Interdependence, Incompatible goals (Carvalho, 2015). According to Michael Nicholson, "a conflict exists when two people wish to carry out acts which are mutually inconsistent (Distlehorst, 2008). John Burton is the view that conflict is a generic phenomenon that knows no system boundaries. Conflict indicates that individuals or groups perceive differences about interests, resources, opinions, values, or practices between themselves and others (De Dreu, 2008).

All the definitions of conflict reflects the following components of conflict i.e. two or more than two persons are involved in a conflict to occur; there is a perceived incompatibility among individuals between ideas, actions, beliefs, or goals; the hostile individual or group see their way as the only way to achieve their goals and objectives. Consequently, when people at work communicate verbally, or through any written medium, for their mutual interests, the communication conflict is bound to occur.

Communication conflicts occur in all human relationships, cultures, and societies. Since the recorded history, there is evidence of conflicts between families, children, coworkers, superiors and subordinates etc (Moore, 2014). Actually, the communication conflicts have been there on

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the earth since the existence of very first human beings. The description of Habeel and Qabeel (sons of Hazrat Adam) story in the holy Quran truly depicts the dialogue of communication conflict initiated for realizing a mutual interest which eventually ended in the death of Habeel (Sura Maa,da Al Quran). Hence from the time immemorial till date, the mankind is entangled in communication conflicts from top to toe from the family -the most sacred institution, to the groups, different tribes, religious groups, political groups, society, and workplace and so on.

3. Theoretical framework

Chaos theory evolved from systems theory underpinned this study that is the latest paradigm being used to understand the organizational conflict (Ford, 2007). It is only in recent times that we have begun to perceive the conflict management system as a human sub-system within an organization. According to this theory, the elements of a conflict management system consists of the physical environment, processes, the rules, the people, the control mechanisms as well as the less visible attributes such as the attitudes, beliefs, and values of the organizational members. Systems thinking to take a particular interest in the patterns and relationship between these parts rather than the parts themselves as an individual. It focuses on "Are they integrated enough to produce emergent properties"? The system produces the emergent property, not the parts themselves. The current theory believes that a healthy conflict management system is integrated. Integration involves a higher level of organization than interconnection. Some organizations have conflict management systems but not all have integrated conflict management systems (S. Elo et al., 2014).

- The various parts of the system do not operate in isolation or indifference to one another in an integrated conflict management system. They are integrated in such a way that there is a productive expression of emotion, good morale, low absenteeism, little stress,
- Organizational members accessing the system is the another level of integration reference. Any conflict behavior makes an interaction with the conflict management system no matter whether the system is actually being accessed like in spite of filing a complaint formally; an employee approaches his colleague in a conflict for the possible resolution.
- Informal access needs to be integrated with formal access channels. Systems thinking theory suggests that the satisfaction with a conflict management system depends on the provision of easy access to the formal aspects of the system.
- Our attitudes are also referenced as the integration toward organizational conflict. Our conflict beliefs should be in alignment with our behavior. We show appreciation not condemnation in case an employee complains.
- Skill based training needs to be integrated intending to develop conflict management skills. The skills must be aligned with the behaviors that are expected in various situations from the employees. Furthermore, competencies must be linked to the performance reviews. If a manager is trained in basic conflict management and resolution skills and still conflicts are allowed to spread in his then that behavior should be reinforced (S. Elo, et al., 2014).

4. Data and Method

The sample of the study was taken with the help of Research Skill & Development Organization (RSDO). RSDO is a Training & Consultancy firm and an NGO in Pakistan that deliver training to its different client organizations. Being the prior workplace of the researcher at RSDO, it was made possible in order to select organizations for the study. The organizations were selected on the basis of their willingness for making their employees available for PBL based training approach and the subsequent survey and interview. As the part of a major study of Ph.D., this paper takes only the qualitative side of the research. Some useful points of Creswell (2013) for qualitative interviewing were kept in view while designing the questions in the interview schedule and conducting the interview(Creswell, 2013).

To facilitate interview and to obtain the responses of the eighteen employees, an interview schedule with a set of questions was prepared (see appendix 1). All the employees were interviewed by the principal researcher. Apart from three questions of demographics, the interview schedule consisted of six questions excluding the items relating to the remaining study. The six questions were related to the exploration of types of communication conflicts, its causes and effective resolution in aligning with Choas theory. The questions were kept as open-ended meant to get the employees reflections on each type, it causes and effective resolution. Conflict is an area that has many aspects and open-ended questions were considered as the most appropriate way to gather responses from the employees. The interview was conducted after a three days training of 40 employees through a purposeful sampling. Since, the optimal sample depends on the purpose of the study, research questions, and richness of the data so there is no commonly accepted sample size for qualitative studies. (Chaudhry, 2011). Being a part of the larger study, 18 respondents were selected out of the total trainees on the basis of their willingness and set criteria i.e. working experience, a number of organizations worked with and working experience in the developing organization. The interviews were conducted on three occasions after the end of each training program. Each respondent was interviewed separately. The responses were recorded under each question and these were read out to them after they had finished and they were asked if they would like to say anything more. The respondents were asked to cite suitable examples from their experiences for each of the questions. To protect the identity of the respondents, they are identified as a code i.e Reseach question 1Group1 Respondent1 i.e RQ1G1R1. It was clarified to them that the data gathered would be used only for the purpose of this research.

Several methods are available in the literature for analyzing and interpreting qualitative interviews. PATTON (1982) also addresses a number of techniques for quantifying and analyzing qualitative interview data. This study used the inductive approach in order to analyze data. The inductive approach uses actual data itself to derive the structure of analysis involves analyzing data with little or no predetermined theory (Burnard, 2008). The inductive analysis is the most popular and used approach to analyzing qualitative data. Among the variety of inductive approaches to analyzing qualitative data, the method of analysis for this research is that of thematic content analysis. Thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative research technique (Cassum, 2014). This method arose out of the approach known as grounded theory. the process

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of thematic content analysis is Indeed often very similar in all types of qualitative research in that the process involves analyzing transcripts, identifying themes within those data and gathering together examples of those themes from the text (S. Elo, M. Kääriäinen, et al. (2014), 2014). Thematic analysis is a method of identifying, analyzing and interpreting themes in qualitative research data(Manning, 2014) . The aim of the thematic analysis is to obtain a condensed and broad description of the phenomenon Braun, 2014).

Keeping in view the nature of the study, all of the interview transcripts were read and organized by the researcher into themes and codes. The data was organized then into themes, sub-themes and further into coding whenever deemed necessary. Two independent researchers from University Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia were asked to verify and validate the accuracy of the categorization, coding, and analytical system. After discussion with them, minor modifications were made to data. The data was also validated by pictures and videos of the respondents being interviewed. It was validated as well through sending it in written form it to all the respondents for verification.

5. Results and Discussion

The responses of the employees to each of the questions are analyzed below. Having sufficient working experience in a number of developing organizations in Pakistan, the author is familiar with the actual experiences by the employees interviewed and this firsthand knowledge by the author has helped this study further. To avoid the creeping of personal bias of the author in the analysis, "bracketing" was ensured. Bracketing refers to "self-awareness of mindset" of the researcher (HUTCHINSON, 1986, p.115). Besides, the author wrote a personal statement of what experiences and the perception he expected to have the communication conflicts in order to become conscious of personal preconceptions, values, and beliefs even before collecting data and during the process of research, (see Appendix 2 for the personal statement).

5.1 Profile of Respondent

The respondents for this study belonged to three organizations presented in the following table

Table 1.

Gender * Organization Cross tabulation

		CMDO	ICMC	Read Foundation	Total
Gender	Female	0	5	0	5
	Male	5	2	6	13
Total		5	7	6	18

The gender imbalance was quite expected as the two organizations did have female staff. The average age of the respondents was calculated as 32 years while the average length of working experience is 8 years of the total 18 respondents. Besides, the designation of the respondent was as the following

Designation of Employees

Child Protection Officer
Donor relation Officer
Finance Assistant
Finance Manager
HOD International relations
HR Officer
Interpreter
Interpreter
IT Manager
Livelihood Officer
M&E officer
Manager M&E
Medical counselor
Program director
Program Manager
Project Coordinator
Reporting Assistant

Since it was staff training so around every section was covered in participation.

5.2 Intragroup and Intergroup Conflict

A number of respondents expressed that they have experience, involved and observed various types of communication conflicts at the workplace. The different causes of these conflicts were also talked about. The respondents suggested as well the ways how to reduce and tackle these conflicts effectively. According to the findings, there are both types of inter-group and intra-group conflicts. As compared to intergroup, intragroup conflicts were more frequently observed in the workplace.

"The occurrences of both inter and intragroup conflicts are a common phenomenon at the workplace. **Intra-group is more frequent** as compared to inter-group conflict. Conflicts among group members used to occur where the **interest** of any member was jeopardized while conflict among groups having **shared interest** has also been a common phenomenon at the workplace. Most of the time, the grouping and their conflicts harmed the **sanctity** and **integrity** of the organization." **(RQ1G3R18)**

Some of the respondents also expressed that the occurrence of the types of conflicts depends on the professional environment within the organization.

"It totally depends on the **professional environment** of every organization to have conflicts in groups and within group members. In one organization, I observed having both inter and intra-group conflicts while in the current organization there are least such kinds of conflicts. No matter which type of conflict is whether intragroup or intergroup, it can be reduced, **resolved** and turned to constructive side through **effective leadership**, management, and **capacity building of employees** so that they could improve upon on **indispensable skills and traits** required in the mutual interaction at the workplace."   **(RQ1G1R3)**

Another respondent expressed it in the following words

"I observed and involved in both types of intergroup and intragroup conflicts at the workplace. The intragroup and intergroup both type of conflicts occur due to injustice, mutual interest, jealousy or unhealthy competition and lack of good leadership. The conflicts between groups prove to be more **disastrous** as the integrity of whole organization stands at stake. The intra-group are limited to be harmful to the group alone. The greatest harm of intergroup could be the splitting apart the group". **(RQ1G2R10)**

Through the expression of respondents, it can safely be concluded that both inter and intra-group conflict exists at the workplace in the developing sector. They usually occur due to unhealthy competition, limited or lack of resources, shared interest, and ineffective leadership. The intergroup conflicts are more disastrous and usually at the larger scale as compared to intra-group. They can be reduced and tackled effectively through good leadership and promoting healthy competition at the workplace.

5.4. Task Conflicts

The intra-group conflicts have further been divided into other types of conflicts like task , relationship conflicts and process conflicts (Carvalho, 2015; Gonzalez, 2013). The respondents shared their experiences of involving in a task conflict. One of the respondents expressed his opinion about occurring task conflict.

"Task conflicts mostly use to exist where there is a **shared responsibility** on a completion of a task/assignment. I experienced a lot of task conflicts due to a number of causes but they were somehow got managed with the help of other **employees** and **supervisor.** The task conflicts frequently trigger in **colleagues** at the same level at the workplace. They rarely happen between **supervisor and subordinate**"

Another respondent had the following views about task conflicts.

"Although I have experienced all kinds of communication conflicts but task conflicts were **frequent** as compared to the other kinds of conflicts. As an employee, it was difficult to deal with it effectively because the conflict would be at the same level and its **effective resolution** would always depend on the **manager**; but as a supervisor, I try to get resolved the task conflicts effectively among my subordinates."

Another respondent shared his opinions in the following words about task conflicts.

"Conflicts over task were used to be there among employees at the workplace. They usually occur due to **unhealthy competition**, **unclarity of roles** and **lack of proper leadership**. Its occurrence and **effective resolution** among employees usually depend on the good

management and leadership. In good a leadership, there do arise task conflicts but they are resolved constructively."

The expression about task conflicts shows that task conflict usually occurs in employees at the same level. It is the type of conflict which uses to exist frequently as compared to their types. It usually happens to occur due to the clarity of roles, unhealthy competition and ineffective leadership at the workplace. Further, they can effectively be resolved through good management and leadership.

5.5 Relationship Conflicts

The respondents also talked about in response to a query on occurring relationship conflicts at the workplace.

"I have mostly observed occurring relationship conflicts like employees would frequently indulge in **jealousy**, **backbiting**, and **hatred** etc. I think everyone at some stage of professional life, gets involved in a relationship conflict due to the diverse **nature** of an individual". (**RQ1G3R17**)

The respondents also talked about the dependence of relationship conflicts on the professional environment at workplace i.e.

"All kinds of conflicts existed and so are the relationship conflicts as well. They usually initiate through a **task or process** conflict although not always. The dealing with these kinds of conflicts depended on the type of **organization** and its **environment.** Like in some organization, the relationship conflict was difficult to arise while in others, it would flourish frequently. Actually, the **leadership and professional environment** were different in both the situations" **(RQ1G1R3)**

Some of the respondents also suggested ways of dealing with the relationship conflicts at a workplace like in the following way.

"All kinds of communication conflicts are triggered at the workplace. This is very much natural but to deal with it in a sound way is a real **challenge** for many employees and organizations. They can be resolved effectively through **regular training of employees** and effective leadership. Like other conflicts, arising relationship conflict is also very much natural. Usually, the relationship conflict gets resolved by the **genuine effort** of the conflicting individual themselves". **(RQ1G2R7)**

The finding reveals as well that there is no proper mechanism of handling relationship conflicts among employees.

"Relationship conflicts are a source of **great stress** at workplace. It negatively affects the performance of employees. Organizations should have some **mechanism** to deal with it effectively. Presently I have never seen any **conscious planning** or mechanism to manage and deal with **it constructively**."

It was also found out that relationship conflict causes great tension and stress at workplace. They usually get started through a task and process conflicts. They can effectively be resolved through conflict resolution skills and traits. There is no effort in the organizations to control and reduce the relationship conflicts since they are not so visible like the other types conflicts. They can effectively be managed and tackled through effective leadership and training of employees.

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5.6 Process Conflict

The respondents shared their views on process conflicts as well. Although occur in fewer proportions comparatively, but they do exist at the workplace.

"I have observed process conflicts and have involved myself as well in it. Actually, when you do not get **clear instruction** from your supervisor about the course of action in the **given assignment** then there arise conflicts among the responsible employees which affect the **quality of task** and **bring discomfort** among employees at the workplace. The process conflict can **disintegrate** the team members**" (RQ1G1R6)**

One of the respondents stated the cause of process conflicts like in the following words;

"Process conflicts arise in an environment where there is no effective leadership to get the work done effectively in team working. The process conflict often leads to relationship conflict which destroys the whole organization and its environment. There develop hatred and lack of trust among all employees. Resultantly, Employees usually are got fired or they resigned in the extreme situation." **(RQ1G2R11)**

About the resolution of process conflict, one of the respondents shared his thinking in the following words.

"I have experienced all types of communication conflicts including a process conflict. The process conflict is as **disastrous** as any other type of conflict could be to the welfare of the employees and organization. The process conflicts like relationship conflicts can be **managed** and resolved through **self-efforts** and with the help of a manager and **leader** effectively." **(RQ1G3R18)**

The majority of the respondents opine that it is the task conflicts that further lead to relationship and process conflicts among employees. The finding of process conflicts shows that process conflicts occur due to shared responsibility for an assignment or task. Giving unclear instruction can also cause to occur process conflicts among employees. To sum up, they trigger mostly due to ineffective leadership and lack of skills in employees. Further, they can prove disastrous if not resolved timely and effectively. They can be tackled effectively through delivering clear instructions and good leadership.

5.7 Discussion

The purpose of current study was to examine the existence, sources, and resolution of communication conflicts among employees of developing sectors at the workplace in Pakistan. The findings from this study are useful in terms of understanding the levels, types, and nature of communication conflicts being occurred at the workplace and its effective resolution within an organization. The results of this work are expected to provide information to employees, leaders and managers to improve their conflict resolution efforts. For example, information from this research could help employees learn to more effectively resolve work conflicts by providing insight into the role of their self-views, their emotions, and the status of the other person in the conflict.

One of the major outcomes of the study reveal that all types of communication conflicts exist but task conflict is most crucial and if not resolved effectively and timely then it could result in a

disastrous situation and eventually transform into process conflicts and relationship. The findings of the study are supported by an empirical study conducted by Awasty et al., (2015), and Jehn, et al., (2015) that examined the conditions under which task conflicts are most likely to transform into destructive forms of conflicts such as relationship and process conflicts (Awasty & Sinha, 2015; Jehn, et al., 2015). Their major finding of the study shows that the task conflict leads to higher irritability expression when group members vary on conscientiousness and openness to experience. Another study also supports the findings which conclude that task and process conflict transform into relationships conflict when there are no social skills (Lee, Huh, & Reigeluth, 2015). One of the other findings of our study reveals that effective management and leadership could help reduce and resolve destructive conflicts no matter what type of conflict it is. Our findings are supported by a study conducted in 2012 online and supervisory engagement in conflict management. It was found to be positively associated with a series of organizational outcomes, including labor productivity, absence rates, and the capacity to handle change compared with other firms in the same industry (Chughtai, 2015). To have a better view of these kinds of communication conflicts, let's have a look at the broader spectrum of these communication conflicts at the political workplace in the context of Pakistan. Pakistan is a state where different regions and groups are influenced by variant nature of conflicts. Conflict in the country is deep rooted and multifaceted (S. B. Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Region-based political groups in Pakistan have historically mobilized for political power largely around ethnic and linguistic identities (Lashari, 2013). Regarding intergroup conflicts, there are, therefore, an ideology based, ethnic and religious based major groups formed that are constantly on open and cold war like PML-N, PPP, MQM, ANP, and Pakistan Tehrik Insaf etc. If looked inside the larger groups/party, there are again sub-group formed on various bases like PML-N group and PML-Muslim league likewise PPP Parliamentary and PPP etc. The formation of more subgroups keeps on going on various bases goes down at the grassroots levels. Within these group members, conflicts, and severe disagreements exist all the time which results in widespread violence, hateful immoral speeches and consistent poisonous news in order to achieve their desired interests (Brinkert, 2010; S. B. a. E. J. T. Merriam, 2015). If glanced at the other types of conflict, the task and process conflict among these groups and as well as among the group members are frequently seen criticizing each other projects and work. While as far as relationship conflicts are concerned, there has continuously been jealousy, a lack of trust, hatred, backbiting etc. among the group and as well as within the same group members and the everyday newspapers are filled in from these stories. To be short, the political spectrum of at macro and micro level also support the findings of this study.

6. Conclusion

This research endeavors conducted a qualitative approach to collect the data from the employees of three developing organizations. The findings from semi-structured interview revealed the existence of different types of communication conflicts including task, relationship and process conflicts at the workplace that become a source of great stress and tension among employees at the workplace. The major finding of the study shows that task conflicts when not

resolved timely and effectively, often lead to process and relationship conflicts. It was also found that these conflicts are mostly triggered through shared responsibilities, shared interest, ineffective leadership and lack of skills in employees. They can be reduced and resolved effectively through training of employees and effective management and leadership. The outcomes of this study are supported by a number of studies conducted recently on the conflicts at the workplace. The researchers recommend the focus on each type of conflict exclusively like the task, relationship and process conflicts including inter and intergroup conflicts in depth as the future research direction so that more thorough and detailed study could help in turning these conflicts into functional or constructive conflicts.

Ethical Consideration
The researcher took official permission from the head of three developing organizations from which the researcher drew a sample for this study. The employees were debriefed on the description of the study at the beginning of the study so that they could be in better position to respond to their perception. As an ethical requirement, all the records and participants identities were treated as confidential.

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Appendix 1

Interview

Name	**Age**	**Gender**
Time	**Designation**	

Being a doctoral student at UTHM Malaysia, I welcome you to take part in a research study on the "Use of Problem-Based Learning Approach for Employees Training" in Pakistan. The research is part of my doctoral thesis at the Faculty of Science Technology and Human Development in University Tun Hussein Onn of Malaysia. Taking part in research is open to everyone and your response will be recorded with complete confidentiality. You can also withdraw from the survey at any stage of answering with no objection on my side. When responding to questions, you should keep in mind that your feelings and expression is going to contribute to the development of new research findings. Participation in research will not take more than maximum 15 minutes; your cooperation is therefore requested. Please note that this research study is approved by the faculty of Science, Technology and Human Development, UTHM Malaysia and I would like to thank you for your time and support in this regard.

Q 1) What types of communication conflicts did your experience or observe among employees at the workplace.

 Kindly give detailed response (Conflicts over task/ over personal issues/over the process of task etc; Conflict between two employees/ between groups within group members and conflict within a person himself/herself)

Q 2) Can you kindly state the main causes of intergroup and intragroup relationship communication conflicts among employees at the workplace in Pakistan?

Q 3) Can you kindly state the main causes of task and relationship communication conflicts among employees at the workplace?

Q 4) How inter and intragroup conflict can be resolved effectively.

Q 5) How task and relationship conflict can be resolved effectively.

Q 6) what are the adverse effects of these communication conflicts?

Appendix 2: Personal Statement

The author expects the existence of different types of workplace conflict at the workplace based on some potential causes and their effective resolution

1.   Being a natural phenomenon, a conflict exists in every organization but its nature and kinds vary depending on the organizational environment.
2.   The communication conflict is mostly caused by weak leadership, lack of resources, unhealthy completion, shared tasks, jealousy, lack of trust, lack of soft skills etc.
3.   The communication conflicts are effectively resolved through training employees, and providing good leadership and management.