



YARATICI FİKİRLER VE ETKİN KARARLAR İÇİN YAPICI ÇATIŞMA

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ÖZET

Örgütsel çatışma; sosyoloji, psikoloji, ekonomi, politika gibi farklı bir çok bilim dallarında ele alınmış ve araştırmalar yapılmıştır. Bu araştırmaların bazıları örgütsel çatışmalardan kaçınılması, bastırılması yada tamamen ortadan kaldırılması gerekliliğini ortaya koymaktadır. Diğer araştırmalarda ise çatışmaların belirli limitler içinde örgüt üzerinde olumlu etkileri olacağı belirtilerek, teşvik edilmesi gerekliliği vurgulanmaktadır.

Örgütsel çatışmalar; örgüt içindeki bireylerin birbirleriyle olan karşılıklı bağımlılıklarının ve beraber çalışmalarının bir sonucu olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır. Bu karşılıklı bağımlılık ve beraber çalışma örgütün amaçlarına ulaşması için gereklidir. Bu sebeple, çatışmaların örgütler için kaçınılmaz bir gerçek olduğu günümüzde kabul edilen bir görüştür.

Çalışanlar arasındaki çeşitli nedenlerle ortaya çıkan çatışmalar, etkin şekilde yönetildikleri takdirde farklılıkların ve tartışmaların, örgütteki ilişkilerin ve güven duygusunun artırılmasını, karar vermede yada problem çözümünde alternatiflerin ortaya çıkarılmasını, dolayısıyla kararın her yönüyle tartışılmasını sağlayacaktır. Gerek örgüt gerekse çalışanlar için olumlu sonuçların ortaya konulduğu bu tür yönetim tarzı, yapıcı çatışma yönetimi olarak adlandırılmaktadır.

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The Negative and Positive View of Conflict

The common meaning of conflict is often viewed negatively. It generally symbolizes anger, tension, disagreement and fighting. People usually have negative and painful experiences when they are in conflict. People respond to conflict by either avoiding or attacking at the other person's feelings. When people do not know how to work with conflict constructively, it results in animosity, poor performance and productivity.

People who experience frequent and high levels of conflict may show withdrawal psychologically (apathy and indifference) and physically (absenteeism, tardiness and turnover). In other cases aggressive and hostile behavior may result in stealing or damaging property (Hellridgel and Slocum, 1982: 635).

On the other hand, conflict is a natural result of working together. It is a part of everyday life and organizations. Organizations consist of many people, each with different experiences, knowledge, capabilities and emotional characters. It is obvious that there would be some clashing values, disagreement on decisions, and different goals among people.

If these differences and disagreements are properly managed, conflict can become a positive source of energy and creativity. These differences and disagreements are the ingredients of innovation, creative decision and organizational effectiveness.

Competition, rivalry, differences and other forms of conflicts have a positive value for the people and organizations. The diversity can keep the organization vital by stimulating creativity, promoting innovation and bringing the change in order to survive in the highly competitive marketplace. Therefore, an organization totally devoid of conflict would become stagnant and unresponsive to change.

Instead of viewing conflict as a negative activity to be avoided from organization, it should be confronted and handled constructively. The organization should accept and deal openly with conflicts. The negative view of conflict, which is seen as intrinsically negative and whose presence a sign of something wrong within the organization, should be changed to positive view of conflict.

As accepted by Modern Management Approach, conflict is seen as inevitable and not necessarily harmful to the organization. According to this approach, conflict, to a certain limit, is beneficial to the organization. The approach suggests that the level of conflict should be controlled and managed. From this perspective, the task of management is to manage the level of conflict and its resolution for the optimal organizational performance. When the level of conflict is too low, the organization changes too slowly to meet the new demands being made upon it, and its survival is threatened. When the level of conflict is too high, chaos and disruption also endanger organization's chances for survival (Stoner and Freeman, 1989: 393). If the optimal conflict level could be provided, it would result

in highly constructive conflict, in which organization performance would be maximum.

Therefore, instead of suppression conflict, the management should try to manage and control organizational conflict in optimal levels in order to benefit from it. If the optimal level is not reached, the conflict may not be constructive. Organizations should need to know how to deal with constructive conflict to achieve complex organizational goals.

Constructive Conflict

Constructive conflict describes how organization members can strengthen their abilities to deal with their differences that can cause distress and prevent them from getting their way. It shows how an organization can use arguments, disputes, and dissent to deepen their competence and relationships (Tjosvold, 1993: 1). Constructive conflict involves learning how to disagree on issues and come up with a solution that can benefit the entire organization. Constructive conflict develops not only a collaborative relationship but also cooperative manner.

Discussing the benefits of constructive conflict and the potential losses from destructive conflict can result in changing organization member's manner in a collaborative way where win-win situation is accepted.

Discussing the benefits of conflict can be characterized as broadening of understanding about the problem, an increase in the number of alternatives, stimulating creativity, strengthening the relationships, developing a climate of trust and cooperation, concentrating on win-win situation and better ideas and decisions (Baker and Morgan, 1986: 25).

Some of the destructive consequences of conflict can be feeling stress, anger, defeat, misusing of personal or organizational resources, diminishing of organization's overall performance, energy, and dedication, a climate of distrust and forcing people to take sides.

When people begin to recognize negative results of conflict, they become more willing to work toward cooperation and collaboration (Link, 1990: 9). The potential losses can be turned into a win situation for everyone. The organization starts to view conflict as a mutual beneficial solution rather than a competitive fight.

Constructive conflict can be provided by effective conflict management. The first way that guides to constructive conflict is not to eliminate conflicts but to manage them to maximize beneficial aspects and minimize harmful aspects. Constructive conflict requires that variety of options be generated before choices are made. This means that people must feel comfortable about making suggestions and expressing their ideas (Baker and Morgan, 1986: 28). In organizations everybody must be aware of the purpose of constructive conflict that is to create an atmosphere where all conflicts, disagreements, and differences get solved in win-win approach. In the debates or discussions, personalities should be left out, and attention should be focused on the issues. Communication channels should be kept open and the

organization provide everyone with an opportunity to be heard. Active listening also has an important role in constructive conflict. It helps us to understand each other's perspectives if we listen actively instead of not participating in passive ways. By creating such an environment, people would be able to air their ideas, differences and dissents and would be also willing to listen each other. At this point, organizations can benefit from all positive aspects of constructive conflict.

Groupthink and Constructive Conflict in the Decision Making

Many organizations have adopted team decision making as a fundamental approach to deal effectively with problem solving (Kochery, 1993: 185). The main reason of using the team or group approach is because it would improve the quality of decisions by providing a diversity of perspectives, which may bring out creative ideas and solutions. Many organizations feel that a major objective in group or team is to foster agreement over decisions. This is an important indicator of group cohesion and harmony. As a general rule, a higher level of cohesiveness presents a higher level of cooperation, satisfaction and morale. The greater acceptance of group's decisions leads to better communication and lowers the hostility and tension (Baron, 1993: 239). This group cohesion and harmony may result in groupthink, in which group members try to avoid being too critical in their judgment of other group member's ideas and focus on developing concurrence (Gordon, 1993: 239). The group cohesiveness can create strong pressures toward uniformity and conformity. Group members tend to suspend their own critical thinking in favor of expressing ideas that conform to the group decisions.

In this atmosphere, group members might be unwilling to express their opposing ideas and opinions during decision-making process. The organization would mostly fail to see all the possibilities surrounding the issue without those different views (Firth, 1991: 3). Therefore, the given decision would not be well discussed and analyzed. The decision would be given without any dissent, also without any exchanging and integrating of any ideas which would lead to efficient decisions.

Managers who are compliant, non-argumentative and surrounded by "yes" type of subordinates are effected by the group's cohesiveness (Abbassi and Hollman, 1993: 7). The group's cohesiveness and loyalty to the manager would dominate the decision making process. Encouraging "yes" sayers promotes poor decisions and lack of creative ideas and solutions. The pressure to be a "good team player" and blind loyalty to the manager would discourage people to express their opinion freely. This would result in dysfunctional decisions.

Research and studies on cognitive conflict have demonstrated that conflict can improve understanding of issues and generating alternatives. The studies suggested that conflict can be used as an effective technique in decision making. According to these studies, encouraging controversy and dissent would result in efficient and creative decisions and combat groupthink within a group. Researchers came up with the "Devil's Advocate and Dialectic Methods" for programmed conflict into organizational decision process in order to experience the benefits associated with conflict in decision making (Gordon, 1993: 252). Both methods

depend on the creation of subgroups that promote critical analysis of the group's decision. The main purpose of both methods is to promote the quality of decision given by group. The Devil's Advocate and Dialectic Method create cognitive conflict that stimulates critical thinking, expresses ideas openly, and provides opportunity to create alternatives (Kochery, 1993: 189). Both methods are assigned to identify potential pitfalls with a proposed solution or idea. Therefore, the potential pitfalls are considered before the decision is given and are prevented from decreasing effectiveness of the decisions.

Innovation and Constructive Conflict

The highly competitive and demanding marketplace forces organizations to be interested in continuous improvement and in the learning organization. Organizations should continually adopt to changes and be innovative in order to respond to technological advances, competition, and consumer preferences. In this sense, constructive conflict is important for successful innovations and finding creative ideas.

Creative ideas usually come up in an environment where flow and flexibility of these ideas are encouraged. Controversy, dissent, and opposing ideas increase the number and the quality of ideas. More ideas tend to increase the chances of generating creative and usable solutions. When there is a clash of opposing ideas, people critique and point out weakness and strengths of each other's ideas. They discuss not only each other's arguments but also begin to wonder whether their original position is as useful and sensible as they had assumed. Then people search for new information, more relevant material, and question their opponents to clarify their positions (Tjosvold, 1993: 83). Therefore, the solution is reviewed by all perspectives. This process enables group to enhance the quality and efficiency of the solution.

Controversy helps people get rid of their own views and frameworks. When people focus on specific problem, they frame the problem in ways that emphasize certain aspects of the situation and ignore others (Carr, 1994: 43). People, instead of focusing onto one particular idea or solution, can consider wide variety of solutions and approaches to a problem by pooling and collecting the ideas, and opinions (Timpe, 1987. 17). This is one of the characteristics of being creative and generating creative ideas, which is known as the frame flexibility. When people and organizations value and use the multiple perspectives, different views in decision making occurs. More controversy in the workplace increases the potential for multiple perspective , the potential for the frame flexibility and continuing creativity (Carr, 1994: 63).

Conclusion

It is important for an organization to view conflict as a positive process that would be able to surface differences and disagreements and provide space to discuss all possible perspectives. It would also stimulate a deeper sense of questioning and integrating new and challenging information to generate creative ideas and solutions. Conflict and controversy are necessary in the decision making

process to ensure that all aspects of a decision are reviewed. This results in raising critical questions, exposing weakness of decision, and providing fresh alternatives. Different opinions and ideas are needed to solve the problem and to produce creative ideas. Different ideas, dissent and controversy are the life-blood of a dynamic and growing organization (Abbassi and Hollman, 1993: 10).

For today's business environment maintaining status quo is no longer acceptable. Continuous improvement is a necessity for organizations to survive in the competitive markets. The competitive markets require organization to be innovative and adaptable to the changes. In the sense of generating creative ideas and strengthening relationships, constructive conflict has vital importance in organizational survival. Therefore, organization should create atmosphere where open discussion, dissent and different viewpoints are valued and encouraged. In this working environment, people can freely express and exchange their ideas and concerns, feel secure and comfortable to express their opinions even though they are unpopular and not be seen as being a "bad team player" when they disagree with the manager or group decision. In order to create this kind of environment in an organization, all members of the organization must be taught and encouraged to use a positive conflict process (Capozzoli, 1995: 5). By creating such kind of atmosphere, constructive conflict would become an important ingredient of a successful organization.

ENDNOTES

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