CONFLICT AND NEGOTIATION AT WORKPLACE

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Abstract

This study aims to search conflict and negotiation in Turkish work culture in production area. For this reason participants were interviewed with real life experiences questions about in conflict situations at work. It was investigated that participants defined conflict and negotiation in association. The findings revealed that employees stated the causes of conflict under two headings like work related causes and interpersonal relationship related causes. It was also found that the employees have different attitudes or responses in negotiation to the different persons according to their position in the hierarchy. In negotiation process the employees use some distinct strategies and skills. Turkish employees use mostly competent, relationship oriented and also avoidant strategies, they do not want to take risk in negotiation. Lastly it was found that some effective and universal negotiation skills and also ineffective negotiation skills were used in negotiation by the employees. When they plan the negotiation they think about how their communication should be in process. The results were discussed in the light of national culture literature.

Key words: conflict, negotiation, organizational culture, negotiation strategies, negotiation skills

Introduction

This study aims to descriptively search conflict and negotiation in Turkish work culture in production area. How these concepts defined, how the relationships between these two concepts are perceived, what are the causes of conflicts, what kinds of strategies and skills used in negotiation, are main concerns of the study. In general organizations, individuals and groups interact with other organizations, individuals and groups. During this process, the conflict inevitably emerges due to struggle over scarcity of resources (Karaip 2000; Puritt and Kim 2004:7). When the parties need to decide how they share the resources, the negotiation process takes place (Bazerman, Curhan, Moore and Valley; 2000). Therefore, it is almost impossible to distinguish conflict and negotiation from one another. These two processes have strong intricate relationship (Kim and Kitani, 1998; Pearson and Stephan, 1998).

There are numerous studies about conflict and negotiation in the literature. Particularly, the literature in the west developed many models. However, it is difficult to say that conflict and negotiation processes are universal by which the modernization process of states and their economic development diversify this process from country to country (Wang, Jing and Klossek, 2007). Therefore, culture should be involved into the subject on evaluation of the two concepts requiring new studies that defines conflict and negotiation in different cultures.

Culture is common value system between people speaking same language and having the same dialectic (Tirandis 1994). Although many studies on culture emphasizes different cultural dimensions; the studies on cultural differences strongly patterned on Hofstede's cultural dimension definitions (1968, 1972, 2001). These dimensions are power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism-collectivism and masculinity-femininity. Power distance is defined as acceptance and expectance that power is distributed unequally in society. Individualistic-collectivistic dimension explores the degree to which people in a society are integrated into groups. The uncertainty avoidance dimension can be defined as society's tolerance for ambiguity in which people embrace or avert an event of something unexpected, unknown, or away from the status quo. Lastly masculinity-femininity dimension is defined as a preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material rewards for success at masculinity side and also a preference for cooperation, modesty, caring weak and quality of life at femininity side. If the difference between sex roles are high, success is so important it means that there is a masculine culture.

The literature on conflict and negotiation generally addresses Hofstede's cultural dimension paradigm. The studies on Turkey found that Turkish national culture is collective, high on power distance and uncertainty avoidance (Agee and Kabasakal, 1993; Göregenli, 1997; Hofstede, 2001; İmamoglu and Küller, 1993; Kozan and Ergin, 1998; Tezer, 1999; Uysal 2002).

Method

This study aims to search conflict and negotiation at work in Turkish culture descriptively. For this reason qualitative data have been obtained from a product company. 28 employees participated in the study. Research sample is composed of 21 males and 7 females. The age of participants is ranged from 26 to 53 years old. The participants mostly engineer and technical personnel from different departments (e.g. production department, quality department), one manager and two team leaders have been also participated in. The total work year of employees is ranged from 1 to 35 years. Their seniority in that company is ranged from 1 to 32 years.

The participants interviewed with almost 45 semi structured open ended questions. The questionnaire asks the participants their real life experiences about conflict creating situations at work in last 15 days. The questions like; "*I would like to talk with you about a conflict that you were experienced at work in last 15 days. You experienced it with who? How you define the problem that create the conflict? etc.*" can be given as examples of the open ended questions. The interviews take 30-60 minutes. After the data collection finished, the researcher and the two other research assistants independently proceed the content analyses. Themes and subthemes which are the result from the content analyses, were taken together, confronted with each other and controlled by the researcher. She have realized that the results of independent analyses overlaps all most % 90.

Results and Discussion

First of all this qualitative data give chance to define conflict and negotiation at work in Turkish culture. As a result of the analysis, the researcher found that participants define the conflict as a difference of opinions between the sides. For example participant 19 defined conflict with following words "*Conflict comes out when the sides have different opinions I think*". All of the participants believe that conflict is inevitable and in some situations it is necessary to be in conflict. They stated that when person believes to be in the right or provide evidence for his/her rightness, conflict is fateful. The conflict creating conditions could be dived into two like positive reasoning and negative reasoning. At positive side participant claim that conflict is necessary for expressing oneself, making decision, creating new ideas, coming to an agreement and solving the certain problems. On the negative side participant stated that conflict is inevitable when they confronted insoluble problems, when there is destructive competency and also unclosed gap between the ideas of the sides.

The participants define the negotiation as a conversation between the sides to conclude the agreement. In here all of the participant define the negotiation positively. For example they insisted the importance of being persuasive, trying to find mutual benefit, having cooperation and seeking to reach an understanding for getting favorable results in negotiation. For example participant 26 "*...in negotiation people presents their own ideas. The result is not negative like conflict. Everybody try to persuade their opponents...*"

The participants make association between conflict and negotiation. Accordingly, conflict is negative and negotiation is positive sides of the same case. They insisted that if there is a conflict there is also negotiation. For example participant 23 stated that "*Negotiation takes place because of conflict. Means... in reality they are interdependent. Negotiation do not take place without conflict*". The participants believe that in some cases conflict turns negotiation; in another negotiation turns conflict. So they take places interchangeably.

The research showed that the causes of conflicts in that product company mostly occur because of business issues and also because of interpersonal relationships. The business issues that causes conflict can be defined under some distinct subheadings. For example unexpected production problems and argent works, prioritization of the tasks, finding or sharing the resources, changing the work construct, workload, imbalanced work distribution, conflicting scope of authorities, ambiguous work goals. For an example of resources, participant 17 gave an example "*So.. I am giving an example... the most important problem in the assembly line is material deficits*". On the other hand interpersonal relationship heading has two dimensions like leader- follower relations and colleague relations. At leader-follower side participants stated that intolerance and lack of feedback by leaders, bad relationship between supervisor and employee, unequal treatment by the supervisor between the employees and powerful hierarchy are the causes of conflicts at work. At colleague relation side the causes of conflict can be defined mistrust, weak communication, lack of empathy and support deficits between colleagues.

In compatible with the denoted findings the participants stated clearly that, they have different attitudes or responses in negotiation to the different persons according to their position in the hierarchy of their company. In one side they prone to negotiate conflicting situation with their coworkers or subordinates, in another side they are reluctant to negotiate with their superordinate. As a result they comply what their boss demand in negotiation. It can be realized that this type of manner differences in negotiation according to the opposites' status portraits both high power distance and collective cultures.

In this study, it is found that the employees use some distinct strategies to solve the conflict. This strategies can be grouped in three like competent strategies, relationship oriented strategies and avoidant strategies. For example, in unexpected production problems side participants put the blame on the opponent when the negotiators are from the different departments. They also stated that they may use their status or refer to their boss' status to put pressure on the opposite side. For example *participant 24 said that "Mr. X's strategy is certain. He means he is the boss/authority in here. What he said that takes place."* These kinds of strategies are competent strategies. Competent strategies are frequently seen in culture that is high on power distance. The culture which is high on power distance has dominant leaders, people accept the powerful ones authority. In short in this culture less powerful members of organizations expect and accept that power is distributed unequally. So the more powerful one wins the negotiations. Another dominant strategy is not to solve the conflict and keep their warm relations in the company. Participants think that if they negotiate the problem their relationships may be destroyed. The company which the interviews realized, located in a small city in Turkey. The employees make companion with each other and they get together after work. So they do not want to damage their social network. This kind of strategies in negotiation can be named as relationship oriented strategies. For example participant 5 expressed that *"We are friends and the tasks should be finished... so we do not need to be in conflict".* These kinds of attitudes like referring status and avoiding break down the social relationship, are features of collective culture. The fundamental issue addressed by collectivistic culture is the degree of interdependence of its members in a society. In this culture people belong to in groups' that take care of them in exchange for loyalty. And people´s self-image is defined in terms of "we" instead of "I".

On the other hand findings generally showed that participants avoid to taking risks in negotiation in this study. They do not use risk taking as a negotiation strategy. It can be interpreted as an indicator of high uncertainty avoidance of Turkish culture. In this culture employees deal with the fact that the future can never be known. Ambiguity in future brings anxiety to people. In here the question is *"What should people do for dealing with anxiety?"* People deal with anxiety in different ways in different cultures. For example people try to control the future or just let it happen. In high uncertainty avoidance culture, people feel high threatening by ambiguous or unknown situations and they want and try to avoid them. If it can be considered as a strategy it can be named avoidant strategy. Only few participants who said that they took risk in negotiation listed their risk like; giving up every think related with workplace (e.g. participant 3 *"Before the conflict I give up every think and dive in conflict. I do not have any fear. I can only miss my job. OK. I accept that risk".*), misunderstanding, talking without evidence, talking on area that he/she inexperienced.

The research also revealed that participants showed mostly effective negotiation skills but few ineffective ones. For example participants give importance on verbal and nonverbal communication skills that are convenient in negotiation process, being neutral and fair in negotiation (e.g. participant 19 stated that*" I try to be careful not to blame my opponent and be neutral")* controlling their aggression, not personify the situation, being gentle, exchanging information, using negotiation time properly, trying to meet half way, trying to persuade the opponent. On the other hand, using own status or commanding ones' status and blaming the opponent in negotiation can be counted as ineffective negotiation skills. In here, effective negotiation skills sounds universal. Ineffective skills give clue about the culture that has high power distance.

It was also investigated that half of the employees stated that they do not plan the negotiation. They use informal communication in negotiation. This study has been carried out in a product company. Characteristically problems in a product company take places unexpectedly and in a crisis nature. Because of perceived crisis employees do not have time to plan the negotiation. Thus it may lead to not negotiate the conflicts. They instantly get into action to solve the problem. The employees that plan the negotiation insisted on content of communication. In another words when they plan their negotiation before, they think about their communication style. They want to construct clear, warm and persuasive communication. And also want to exchange the information especially give and take feedback from each other. For example participant 5 stated that *"I mean needed data should be produced... we are parametric and we explain all the things with numbers"*

Conclusion

In this study, the Turkish work culture in production area was descriptively searched from the findings with open ended real life conflict examples of employees. It was investigated that in Turkish work culture conflict and negotiation perceived in association. The findings showed that causes of conflict defined as work related and interpersonal relationship related. The research also revealed that the product company employees have different attitudes or responses in negotiation to the different persons according to their position in the hierarchy. As a result of study it was appeared that Turkish employees use mostly competent, relationship oriented and also avoidant strategies, they do not want to take risk in negotiation. On the other hand, employees stated some effective and universal negotiation skills. And they have also ineffective negotiation skills that give an idea about highly power

distance cultural profile. All over the findings Turkish work culture on conflict and negotiation in production area can be defined as high in collectivity, power distance and uncertainty avoidance. This definitions are consistent with related Turkish literature (Agee and Kabasakal, 1993; Göregenli, 1997; Hofstede, 2001; İmamoglu and Küller, 1993; Kozan and Ergin, 1998; Tezer, 1999; Uysal 2002). This study gives us detailed answers of some questions what do the participants describe the causes of conflict at work? How they give examples of competent, avoidant and relationship oriented negotiation strategies? What kinds of risks that the participants take? In the future researcher plan to develop original scales on cultural strategies in negotiation and negotiation motivations based on current qualitative study.

Professor Mamatoğlu graduated from the Department of Psychology at Middle East Technical University. She has masters and doctoral degrees in social psychology from Ankara University. Nihal Mamatoğlu has been worked as a human resources specialist in Arçelik CO. for 7 seven years. She is a faculty member at Department of Psychology at Abant Izzet Baysal University since July 2003. Mamatoğlu performs many theoretical and practical academic study in the field of social and organizational psychology. She is giving consulting and training in this area. Mamatoğlu has been still studying on occupational health and safety, performance evaluation, organizational identity, organizational culture, conflict and negotiation, violence, discrimination, disability employment and accessibility issues.

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