

Communication Strategies in Managing Conflict in Multicultural Teams

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 14 May 2022

Revised 7 June 2022

Accepted 8 July 2022

Key words:

Conflict management,
Multicultural teams,
Effective communication,
Communication skills,
Team productivity,
Cultural diversity,
Team performance.

ABSTRACT

Conflict management in multicultural teams is a major challenge faced by organizations in this era of globalization. Cultural diversity within a team can trigger tensions that if not managed properly can undermine collaboration and overall team performance. In this case, effective communication is key in managing cultural diversity and minimizing potential conflicts. Managers who can implement open and empathy-based communication have a greater chance of maintaining harmony within the team and increasing work productivity. This article reviews how managers can use communication to resolve conflicts in multicultural teams, as well as the importance of communication skills in maintaining good working relationships. It also discusses how organizations can provide the right training and resources to support managers in managing conflict and improving team performance. With the right communication approach, organizations can ensure more solid, creative, and productive teams, ultimately bringing long-term success to the organization.

INTRODUCTION

Multicultural teams are increasingly common in organizations as the business world becomes more global. Team members from different cultural backgrounds often bring diverse perspectives, which can enhance creativity and innovation. These differences also bring the potential for conflict, whether related to differences in values, communication styles, or social norms. In this case, it is important to manage conflict in a constructive way so that differences can be utilized as strengths for team progress (Bouncken et al., 2016).

Many organizations do not fully understand how cultural conflict can affect team performance. Poorly managed conflict can damage relationships between team members, lower morale, and even hinder the achievement of common goals (Obsuwan et al., 2021). Team members who do not feel understood or valued because of their cultural background may become less engaged or even deliberately withdraw from the collaboration. There needs to be an in-depth understanding of how conflict arises, its impact on team dynamics, and how to resolve it so that it remains beneficial to the organization and individuals.

Strategies for managing conflict in multicultural teams need to be tailored to the characteristics of each team, and influenced by the culture and norms of the team. In this case, an effective communication-based approach becomes very important. Team members who come from different cultural backgrounds may have different ways of expressing disagreement or resolving issues (Leontev, 2019). Managers need to have skills in establishing open and transparent communication, and understand how to diffuse tensions that arise.

It is important for organizations to provide training or workshops that can improve conflict management skills for multicultural team members. In a team made up of individuals with different cultural backgrounds, misunderstandings or tensions can arise easily if these differences are not managed wisely. Such training can provide team members with a deeper understanding of the effects of cultural differences. They learn to recognize cultural diversity and acquire skills that can be used in dealing with conflict professionally. The training provided can include effective ways to communicate across cultures, as well as ways to negotiate agreements in conflict situations (Obinna & Farkas, 2011).

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One of the main issues that often arises in multicultural teams is the lack of understanding of cultural diversity, which often leads to misunderstandings and conflict. Differences in ways of communicating, interpretation of values, or even ways of working can cause tension among team members. For example, in some cultures, direct and assertive communication is considered a sign of honesty and efficiency, while in other cultures, more subtle and indirect communication is valued as a form of respect. When team members don't recognize or understand these differences, miscommunication often occurs which can lead to misunderstandings. This leads to relationship problems that can disrupt the overall performance of the team. In fact, good conflict management should lead teams to better understand differences and work more efficiently (Gwynne, 2009). This not only improves understanding between team members, but also encourages more innovative collaboration, as different perspectives can lead to more creative solutions.

Conflict in multicultural teams is often not handled with the right approach. Many managers or team leaders lack skills in diffusing tensions caused by cultural diversity. This can make the situation worse, lead to deeper divisions, and end up in lost productivity. In many cases, conflicts that could have been resolved in a constructive way instead drag on, and that hinders the achievement of team goals (Morrison & Banaji, 2019). Team members involved in unresolved conflict can lose focus on their tasks and become less engaged in collaboration. In the long run, this can damage interpersonal relationships within the team, create an uncomfortable work atmosphere, and lower morale and performance.

Managing conflict in multicultural teams is a very important aspect for organizations to consider. With more teams consisting of individuals with different cultural backgrounds, organizations must ensure that they have effective strategies in place to handle such differences. Organizations must have effective strategies to recognize and manage these differences. Without the right approach, conflicts that arise can lead to misunderstandings, worsen relationships between team members, and hinder the achievement of common goals. Good conflict management skills not only improve relationships between team members, but also have a positive impact on productivity and overall organizational performance. Good management can strengthen the culture of inclusion in the organization and ensure that all individuals can work effectively despite coming from diverse backgrounds. This can increase employee ownership and engagement.

The main objective of this research is to understand how effective communication strategies can be used by managers to manage conflicts that arise in multicultural teams. This research aims to analyze the various approaches that can be used in diffusing tensions arising from cultural diversity, as well as to see how conflict management can support better and more efficient team performance. By understanding appropriate communication techniques, it is hoped that teams can minimize the negative impact of conflict and work more harmoniously towards achieving common goals.

RESEARCH METHOD

The literature study approach is one of the most appropriate methods to examine the topic of conflict management in multicultural teams. By using this approach, researchers can collect, analyze, and synthesize relevant literature from valid sources to understand the dynamics of conflict in multicultural teams. This literature study relied on relevant journal articles, books and reports that reviewed theories and practices in conflict management. This approach allowed the researcher to understand the various communication strategies that have been implemented by organizations to manage conflict between team members with different cultural backgrounds. According to Webster and Watson (2002), this literature study approach is particularly effective as it can provide a broad overview of the topic without requiring direct engagement with empirical data.

The research process began with determining relevant keywords for the search of related literature, such as "conflict management", "multicultural team", "communication strategies", and "cultural diversity". After that, the collected literature was critically analyzed to identify various perspectives on how conflict occurs and how organizations can manage cultural diversity within their teams. This process also allowed the researcher to evaluate existing results and identify gaps or areas that still require further research. This literature study is expected to provide deeper insights into effective ways of designing and implementing communication skills to support conflict management in multicultural teams (Bryman, 2016).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Conflict in multicultural teams is an inevitable challenge along with the diversity of the members. Each individual brings different values, norms, and ways of interacting based on their cultural background. Although this diversity can enrich the team experience, it also has the potential to cause tension and disagreement (Stura & Johnston, 2018).

Managers need to have the ability to manage these diversity differences, in order to promote more harmonious and productive working relationships.

One of the key elements in managing this conflict is effective communication. In the context of cultural diversity, communication is not only limited to conveying messages, but also includes how these messages are understood and responded to by others who may have different perspectives or interpretations. Without the right communication skills, cultural diversity within the team will be even more difficult to resolve. Open, honest and empathy-based communication is essential to identify the source of tension and find constructive solutions. Managers who are able to implement good communication strategies can create a work environment that supports collaboration between team members, while minimizing the potential for conflict (Brett, 2017). Effective communication also increases clarity of roles and expectations, reduces ambiguity, and strengthens the spirit of cooperation in multicultural teams.

The importance of effective communication is not only limited to resolving existing conflicts, but also to prevent new conflicts from arising in the future. When teams are accustomed to open and clear communication patterns, misunderstandings that often lead to conflict can be minimized from the start. Effective communication helps create transparency in information exchange, clarify expectations, and avoid false assumptions between team members. In a multicultural environment, where communication norms can be very different, establishing common perceptions from the start is essential to avoid unnecessary tension. By establishing good communication habits, managers can facilitate deeper understanding between team members. This in turn improves interpersonal relationships within the team, and promotes more effective and efficient achievement of common goals (Korovyakovskaya & Chong, 2016).

To understand how effective communication strategies can assist managers in managing conflict in multicultural teams, it is important to recognize that cultural diversity is often a potential source of conflict in teams. Teams made up of individuals with different cultural backgrounds often face significant communication challenges (Hiray & Rajhans, 2022). Differences in ways of thinking, values and expectations can trigger tensions, disagreements and differences in perceptions. Therefore, good communication strategies are crucial to manage and ease the tensions that arise from such differences (Thomas & Inkson, 2004). This approach also strengthens mutual trust and fosters cooperation between team members from different cultural backgrounds.

Managers should first identify sources of conflict that may arise in multicultural teams, such as differences in communication styles, social customs, or conflicting norms. These differences can lead to misunderstandings or tension if not recognized early on. By understanding these root causes of conflict, managers can develop appropriate communication approaches. For example, the selection of appropriate communication channels and the implementation of an open dialog approach can strengthen understanding and cooperation between team members from different cultural backgrounds (Morrison, 2011). Effective communication strategies enable faster problem solving and minimizes misunderstandings. Misunderstandings that were previously difficult to unravel can be resolved with a more thoughtful approach, as each party feels heard and understood. Structured and culturally context-sensitive communication helps prevent similar conflicts from resurfacing in the future. Managers who are able to integrate these communication strategies into the team's work culture not only solve existing problems, but also strengthen team cohesion and increase productivity.

Communication strategies implemented in multicultural teams should also pay attention to the importance of active listening and showing empathy. Managers who can listen carefully to each team member's perspective and feelings can prevent potential conflict escalation. By creating space for each team member to express their views openly, managers can strengthen mutual respect and create a more inclusive and productive environment (Gudykunst, 2004). A good communication process also focuses on collective problem solving, where solutions are generated through discussions that involve the contributions of all team members.

Non-verbal communication also plays an important role in multicultural teams. Different cultures have different ways of expressing feelings and responses to certain situations. Ignorance of these differences can lead to unintentional misunderstandings and spark conflict between team members. Managers need to be sensitive to their team members' non-verbal communication. Appreciating differences in emotional expressions, body language, and social cues can help reduce tension and improve interactions between team members (Hall, 1976). Improving understanding of social and cultural context can help managers avoid mistakes that can exacerbate conflict. Education on cultural customs and intercultural communication training can be proactive steps to strengthen empathy and tolerance within the team.

In managing conflict in multicultural teams, communication strategies that involve delivering clear and direct messages are needed. Avoiding ambiguities and ensuring that messages are easily understood by all team members can reduce the likelihood of misinterpretations that can lead to conflict. This is especially important in stressful situations or when team members do not fully understand each other due to differences in language or cultural background (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012). Managers need to ensure that messages are transparent and easily understood by all team members. When team members feel that information is shared openly and fairly, they tend to trust their leaders and peers more, and work together more easily in a conducive atmosphere. Managers who consistently use clear and inclusive communication will be more effective in managing conflict and strengthening cross-cultural coordination.

In an effort to mitigate conflicts that arise, managers must also develop intercultural communication skills. These skills include a deep understanding of the different cultural customs, values and practices within the team. Differences in ways of thinking, solving problems, or responding to instructions can be a source of conflict if not managed appropriately. With a deeper understanding of these differences, managers can avoid misunderstandings and build stronger relationships between team members. This will help create an inclusive work environment, where all team members feel valued and comfortable sharing their ideas and concerns. This understanding also helps managers to adjust their communication approach to be more sensitive to the cultural norms present in the team (Bennett, 1998). In the long-term, teams led by managers with good intercultural skills will be more adaptive to change, more innovative in solving problems, and have lower levels of conflict.

Communication strategies that support team performance in multicultural settings should be based on trust. This trust is built through honest, open and consistent communication. Honesty shows that managers and team members are willing to share information transparently, while openness creates space for dialog and dissent. Managers should set an example in this regard, by demonstrating integrity and professionalism in every interaction. Established trust will facilitate collaboration and minimize tension, allowing team members to work more effectively and productively. Effective communication can help create an atmosphere that supports solid cooperation and constructive conflict resolution (Jehn, 1995).

Communication in multicultural teams must also consider the role of the environment in conveying messages. Each culture has a different way of responding to and processing information, which means that effective communication in multicultural teams must pay attention not only to the words spoken but also to the environment and the way the message is delivered. Managers who are sensitive to social and cultural factors in their communication can help create more productive interactions and avoid misunderstandings that can exacerbate conflict (Hofstede, 2001). In any attempt to manage conflict, it is important to understand both verbal and non-verbal communication related to the cultural environment. Many conflicts arise not because of differences of opinion alone, but because of differences in the way messages are understood due to different cultural contexts.

In multicultural teams, team members often have different ways of managing stress and pressure. An effective communication strategy should also take into account these different ways of responding to conflict. Each culture has its own norms and approaches to dealing with conflict and expressing emotions. Some cultures tend to express stress openly, while others may hold back and choose to keep the stress internal. These differences often lead to gaps in understanding among team members, especially when facing challenges or tensions at work. Providing emotional support through empathic communication can help reduce tension and speed up problem solving. By providing space for team members to talk about their challenges, managers can strengthen mutual trust and cooperation within the team (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004).

The importance of intercultural communication skills training in organizations is key to improving the effectiveness of conflict management. In multicultural teams, each member brings different perspectives and approaches to problems and ways of communicating, which can be a source of potential conflict if not managed well. It gives team members and managers the skills to identify and manage cultural diversity constructively. By gaining a deeper understanding of the cultural dynamics that exist within the team, they can be better equipped to deal with challenges that arise in their daily interactions. This communication training also focuses on increasing awareness of cultural biases and ways to overcome them (Bennett, 1998). Through training, individuals can learn to recognize and overcome these biases, and develop a more open and inclusive attitude towards differences.

In multicultural teams, providing effective feedback is a very important aspect of managing team dynamics and improving performance. The way feedback is delivered is heavily influenced by the cultural background of each team member. Some cultures may be more receptive to direct and open feedback, while others may be more sensitive to overly direct or critical ways of delivery. Managers also need to develop skills in providing constructive and supportive feedback. In multicultural teams, the way feedback is delivered can vary greatly based on the culture. It is important for managers to adapt the way they give feedback to fit the culture of the team members, so that the message does not cause further conflict. Feedback given in a sensitive and constructive manner can improve team performance and encourage more efficient problem solving (Brett et al., 2006). Effective feedback management based on proper cultural understanding will speed up problem solving, increase productivity, and create a more solid and collaborative team.

In practice, managers who want to facilitate successful collaboration in multicultural teams must be able to manage conflict in a way that resolves current problems and prevents similar problems in the future. Managing conflict in an effective way means understanding its root causes, be it cultural differences, communication styles, or unclear expectations. It is important for managers to not only solve problems reactively, but also identify potential sources of future conflict and deal with them proactively. By implementing good communication strategies, managers can create a culture of open, transparent and inclusive communication, which allows each team member to feel valued and understood (Korovyakovskaya & Chong, 2015). This will further strengthen team performance and increase overall organizational effectiveness.

Managing conflict in multicultural teams is not easy, but it can be done with the implementation of appropriate communication strategies. When communication is built on mutual understanding and respect for cultural diversity, managers can create a more harmonious atmosphere, where each individual feels valued and recognized. Effective communication skills are essential in ensuring that any differences can be used as opportunities to strengthen teamwork (Alemu, 2016). Good communication involves not only the ability to speak clearly, but also the ability to listen with empathy and understand the perspective of others. Cultural differences that may initially be perceived as a source of conflict can serve as a force that strengthens teamwork, improves performance, and drives the achievement of organizational goals.

Through an open and transparent communication approach, managers can identify problems early and take the needed steps to prevent greater conflict. Good conflict management will lead to improved overall team performance, where each team member can contribute maximally with a sense of security and mutual trust (Videnová et al., 2012). This will certainly have a positive impact on the organization, both in achieving short-term and long-term goals.

Finally, it is important to note that conflict management in multicultural teams requires ongoing commitment. Managers must constantly hone their communication skills to overcome differences and build strong relationships among team members. By doing so, they can create a work environment that is productive, innovative and able to face increasingly complex global challenges.

CONCLUSION

Conflict management in multicultural teams is crucial to organizational success, given the diversity of team members who bring various perspectives and cultures. Conflicts that arise can potentially damage interpersonal relationships, hinder team performance, and even interfere with achieving organizational goals. Managers need to implement effective communication to address such conflicts, by ensuring each individual feels valued and understood. Open and empathy-based communication can help reduce tensions arising from cultural diversity and increase mutual trust within the team.

In order to create an environment that supports constructive conflict resolution, managers must be committed to continuously developing their communication skills. Success in managing conflict depends on the ability to create a comfortable atmosphere for all team members, so that they can work together optimally. It is important for organizations to provide training to managers on cross-cultural communication skills and the application of techniques that support the creation of more solid and productive teams. This will lead to better team performance and more efficient achievement of organizational goals.

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