Communication and Conflict Resolution

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Prevalence of Conflict in the Workplace

- Managers spend 60% of time related to personnel issues, requests, and problematic situations
- Organizational concerns for voice, fairness, and managing grievances
- Innovations and change typically entail some degree of conflict or resistance
Overview of Presentation

• Definition, key assumptions, and role of communication in conflict
• Distinctions between dysfunctional and functional conflicts
• Overview of 2\textsuperscript{nd} generation gender issues
• Approaches and guidelines for effective conflict management
Definition of Conflict

Social interaction of two or more interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals

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Characteristics of Conflict

- Perceived incompatibilities
- Expressed struggle
- Interdependence of parties
- Simultaneous cooperation and competition
- Potential interference or blocking of goals
Misperceptions and Assumptions about Conflict

- Conflict is not evil; it is the normal state of affairs
- The best metaphor of conflict is a dance or a dialogue, not a war
- People should develop a repertoire of approaches for managing conflicts
Role of Communication in Conflict Management

- Conflict interaction
  - Evolves in stages
  - Acquires a momentum of its own
  - Becomes cyclical or patterned
  - Can escalate or de-escalate
  - Is linked to relationships and past communication patterns
Destructive or Dysfunctional Conflict

- Characterized by:
  - Growth in issues, parties, and costs
  - Blurred and distorted issues
  - Frequent emotional eruptions
  - Parties become inflexible
  - Decreased communication
Constructive or Functional Conflict

- Characterized by:
  - Defining and clarifying the problem
  - Uncovering needs and interests
  - Generating and prioritizing options
  - Engaging in a dialogue
  - Enhancing mutual understanding
Second Generation Gender Issues

- Gender as a socially organized construction
- Distinction between 1st and 2nd generation gender issues
- Types of 2nd generation gender issues
  - Ideal worker—work-family conflicts
  - Gendered work—work assignment conflicts
Research Findings on Work-Family Conflicts

• Inconsistent link between availability of company practices and reduction of work-life conflict
  – Frequent use equals perceived greater conflict
  – Differential effects across organizational levels
  – Knowledge of policies varies

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Research Findings on Work-Family Conflicts

- Factors that reduce work-family conflicts
  - Supportive supervisors
  - Supportive organizational cultures
  - Amount of autonomy and control over the job
  - Ability to alter patterns of work overload
Research on Gender Work Conflicts

- Reduction in perceptions of gender work assignments are related to:
  - Agency or authority to raise issues
  - Perceived influence
  - Proactive rather than reactive approaches

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Effective Conflict Management Approaches

• Develop a repertoire of interpersonal strategies and styles
  – Avoidance
  – Smoothing
  – Competing
  – Compromise
  – Problem Solving
Effective Conflict Management Approaches

• Attend to the shadow or background of conflict
  – Position self in the conflict
  – Enlisting allies—seed ideas early
  – Focus on framing and reframing
  – Use appreciative moves—save the other party’s face
Framing and Reframing the Conflict

- Naming—what is this conflict about?
- Explaining—how do I explain it?
- Blaming—how am I assessing blame?
- Claiming—who owns it?
Alter or Change the Story

- Ways to describe events, occurrences, and parties
- Key elements of stories
- Ways that stories are similar and different
- Moral of the story
- Elements missing in the story
Overall Guidelines for Conflict Management

- Dialogue—seek common ground
- Empathy—cast the conflict in the other person’s terms
- Discover underlying interests
- Redefine—change focus or definition of the problem
- Avoid escalation

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