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SETTING ASIDE: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Conflict is a normal aspect of organizational life, especially in environments with diverse individuals. However, when conflict remains unresolved, it can lead to emotional stress, workplace politicization, and a shift away from the organization's mission. If responsible offices delay intervention, issues may escalate into discrimination or harassment complaints, harming both employee well-being and the organization's reputation. This study examines the implications of "setting aside" a term that reflects the deferment or deprioritization of conflict-related cases. More than a procedural delay, it symbolizes systemic inaction in conflict resolution. The research highlights how such delays diminish trust in institutional processes and allow organizational dysfunction to persist. Using a scenario adapted from a completed case study, the researcher explores how delayed responses affect interpersonal dynamics and organizational culture. The findings stress the importance of timely, fair, and transparent conflict resolution mechanisms. When offices tasked with addressing conflict fail to act promptly, they inadvertently contribute to deeper divisions and long-term damage. This study aims to inform conflict management practices by advocating for institutional accountability and proactive resolution strategies that uphold organizational integrity and employee welfare.

Keywords:

Conflicts, Organizational Conflict, Conflict Reconciliation, Timely action.

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Introduction

Today, conflicts take place in all organizations. Current realities do not allow enterprises to exist in a comfort zone without internal obstacles; otherwise, and institution simply will not survive (D. Svetlana, A. Konstantin, S. Irina, 2021).

According to Brookins and Media (2008) “Employee conflict in the workplace is a common occurrence, resulting from the differences in employees’ personalities and values. Dealing with employee conflict in a timely manner is important to maintaining a healthy work environment. Believing that a small conflict will simply disappear is an inaccurate assumption to make because simple conflicts can grow into major problems if not dealt with appropriately. Managers should understand the common cause of employee conflicts, so that a solution is found before the issues become unmanageable.”

The daily activities of workers in a company basically accept social communications. In an associate atmosphere wherever communication is frank and well established and wherever data flows freely, conflict happens less often. Variations are also supported by past experiences, on messages that are implicit however, left unstated. Today, workers and managers are expected to show sensible social skills and a big degree of openness once confronted by troublesome things at work. Conflict continues to be a supply of stress that shouldn’t be underestimated further as a demotivating force. Managers are inevitably concerned with its resolution, whether or not closely or at arm’s length (Tripp, 1985).

Conflict arises once colleagues disagree on basic problems or once friction is formed by relative issues between people or teams. Conflict management needs the capability to acknowledge things that will end in conflict and can react in an exceeding manner that's of profit to the organization and also the parties. The origins of conflict could cause the organization to redefine bound management and work organization ways (Adomi & Anie, 2005).

The most important element of the conflict management strategy is the early recognition of the conflict and paying attention to the conflicting parties. These elements are important when a manager deals with functional or dysfunctional conflicts. There should be early indication of the conflict and early evaluation of its impact on performance of employees. It is also necessary to make a plan to encourage functional conflict or manage dysfunctional conflict (skemman.islien/category/view). The approach to the conflict and the conflict management style also depend on the participant’s emotional involvement in the conflict (Brodtker, et al, 2001).

As a result, unresolved issues of interpersonal tension and conflict can create emotional stress for employees, politicize the workplace and divert attention from the organization's mission. If employers do not act, conflicts will escalate into larger problems, discrimination and harassment complaints may increase, and the employer's reputation could

be damaged. Why “SETTING ASIDE”? the word itself conveys and compasses the story. The delays in giving action from appropriate offices whose judgment and reasonable decisions are supposed to be perceived are setting the case beyond priority.

In this study, the researcher adapted a scenario from a completed case study as a guide in developing research finding.

Materials and Methods

This study uses case analysis, a teaching and learning approach grounded in problem-based inquiry. Complex scenarios within an organizational framework are thoroughly examined to replicate real-world circumstances and stimulate critical reflection. Through this method, suitable solutions, strategic choices, and recommended courses of action are explored. Case analysis supports structured and logical reasoning in addressing organizational issues (William, 2015; Erskine, Leenders, & Mauffette-Leenders, 1998).

Moreover, the approach enables the researcher to explore contextual variables, stakeholder dynamics, and decision-making processes embedded in organizational challenges. By linking theory to practice, case analysis reveals systemic patterns of inaction and their consequences on institutional performance. It promotes a multidimensional understanding of organizational behavior, particularly in the context of conflict and accountability (Yin, 2014; Northouse, 2019).

This study uses data drawn from a completed case study. The factual elements and possible responses outlined in the original scenario were integrated into this investigation to deepen the analysis. By comprehensively understanding the issue and its context, the study offers culturally relevant recommendations aimed at improving conflict resolution strategies and strengthening institutional accountability (Stake, 1995).

Results and Discussion

In order to maintain confidentiality, the author has used false names to hide and safeguard the identities of those involved in this case.

Organizational conflict, or workplace conflict, is a state of discord caused by the actual or perceived opposition of needs, values and interests between people working together (Organizational conflict, 2021). While, workplace harassment takes many forms. It is not just a big or small business issue. It exists throughout all types of workplaces in the Philippines. The most basic types of harassment are verbal and psychological, there are also more serious forms, such as physical and sexual harassment. All types of workplace harassment are illegal and not only affect an employee's productivity, comfort, and safety at work but also put the organization in legal jeopardy. Although many victims of workplace harassment think they would recognize harassment and report it to those in charge, harassment often leaves them in an uncomfortable and confusing predicament.

Sabastian State College is a state-funded higher education institution located in the southern part of Leyte, Philippines. Currently, the college comprises five academic units, with its flagship program focused on maritime education.

According to the College Code of Sabastian State College, Article 56 outlines the standards and procedures regarding discipline and grievance handling among faculty and non-teaching personnel. Section 1 of the article emphasizes that all employees are expected to demonstrate the highest standards of integrity, decorum, and professionalism in the performance of their duties. It further stipulates that faculty and non-teaching staff may only be removed from service following due process, as mandated by law.

Section 2 of the same article provides that the coverage, jurisdiction, and procedures for administrative disciplinary cases shall conform to the *Uniform Rules on Administrative Cases in the Civil Service*, as set forth in Civil Service Commission (CSC) Resolution No. 991936 dated August 31, 1999.

In relation to complaints and grievances, Article 56 also details the procedural framework under which such matters should be addressed. Section 1 states that any grievance or work-related issue resulting in employee dissatisfaction must be resolved promptly and at the lowest possible level within the organizational structure of the College.

Section 2 mandates the establishment of a grievance machinery aimed at addressing conflicts between and among institute officials and employees. This mechanism is intended to safeguard the rights of aggrieved individuals, ensuring they are protected from coercion, discrimination, retaliation, or any form of partiality.

Finally, Section 3 of the article affirms that all grievance cases must be handled in accordance with the guidelines and procedures set forth in the institution's officially approved grievance machinery. This mechanism must be composed of members known for their unquestionable integrity, probity, sincerity, and credibility.

The central figure in this case is Miss Anika Tubos, a 29-year-old non-teaching staff member holding the position of Administrative Assistant VI. She holds permanent employment status and is assigned to the Administrator's Office at Sabastian State College, where she has served since July 2013.

The individual implicated in the incident is Mr. Theodore Lamoste, a 24-year-old non-teaching personnel employed under a contract of service arrangement. He is assigned to the College of Advanced Education, also at Sabastian State College.

On August 13, 2018, Miss Anika Tubos, a permanently appointed Administrative Assistant VI at Sabastian State College, formally filed a grievance complaint against Mr.

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Theodore Lamoste, a job order employee of the same institution. The complaint stemmed from an incident that took place on August 10, 2018, during which Mr. Lamoste allegedly made false assertions about having entered Miss Tubos's office while she was away on her lunch break. Furthermore, he reportedly harassed her by forcibly entering her office later that day and attempting to engage her in a conversation to which she strongly objected, thereby causing further emotional distress and discomfort.

According to Miss Tubos, Mr. Lamoste informed her that her office door had allegedly been left unlocked and that he had entered the room accompanied by a colleague, Miss Deadra Akiang. Concerned by this statement, Miss Tubos immediately proceeded to verify the condition of her office, only to find it securely locked. In an effort to clarify the situation, she confronted Miss Akiang, who categorically denied any involvement in the incident. During their conversation, Miss Tubos reportedly observed a text message on Miss Akiang's mobile phone from Mr. Lamoste, in which he urged her to corroborate his version of events. The message also contained derogatory remarks about Miss Tubos, which she perceived as demeaning and humiliating.

Feeling harassed and disrespected, Miss Tubos confronted Mr. Lamoste regarding the incident; however, he denied any wrongdoing. Later that same day, Mr. Lamoste allegedly entered her office without permission, claiming he intended to "clear things up." This uninvited intrusion further intensified Miss Tubos's sense of discomfort and reinforced her perception that both her personal and professional boundaries had been violated.

Upon reporting the matter to the Human Resource (HR) Office, Miss Tubos was advised to escalate the issue by filing a formal complaint through the college's Grievance Machinery Committee. This procedural directive raises an important question regarding the role of the HR Office in handling such workplace incidents. Traditionally, HR departments are expected to serve as the initial point of resolution for interpersonal conflicts, especially those involving harassment, intimidation, or threats to employee well-being. The recommendation to elevate the matter to the Grievance Committee, rather than attempting to address it at the HR level, may have unnecessarily complicated the process. Early intervention by HR could have facilitated a more immediate and restorative approach, potentially leading to a more amicable and just resolution.

In her written grievance, Miss Tubos requested an explanation regarding Mr. Lamoste's behavior and underlying intentions. However, in an unexpected turn of events, Mr. Lamoste submitted a counter-complaint several weeks later, accusing Miss Tubos of making false allegations that adversely affected his self-esteem. He demanded a public apology, further entrenching the conflict.

According to the complainant, the incident was immediately reported to the Human Resource Office following its occurrence. However, instead of initiating a resolution at the

HR level, she was advised to submit a formal letter elevating the matter to the College's Grievance Machinery Committee. This procedural response has been identified as a central concern in the case. It raises the question of whether the Human Resource Office fulfilled its expected role in addressing and managing such workplace incidents.

By referring the case directly to the Grievance Committee, the matter was potentially made more complex and prolonged, rather than being addressed promptly and appropriately at the departmental level. Human Resource Offices are not only tasked with administrative functions but are also entrusted with safeguarding employee welfare. As such, early intervention at the HR level could have led to a more immediate, confidential, and constructive resolution. The failure to do so in this case highlights a possible gap in the internal handling of sensitive employee concerns.

As per Civil Service Memorandum Circular No. 02, s. 2001, Revised Policies on the Settlement of Grievance in the Public Sector stated that a grievance shall be resolved expeditiously at all times at the lowest level possible, in the agency. The same circular said that the grievance committee may conduct an investigation and hearing within ten (10) working days from the receipt of the grievance and render a decision within five (5) working days after the investigation. The issue, in this case, is why it takes 4 months to settle a simple reconciliation. Activating the Grievance Machinery took almost twenty (20) days.

The case is particularly unique due to the procedural irregularities observed. As previously noted, no formal inquiry or hearing was conducted by the Grievance Machinery Committee at the conclusion of the process. The committee merely issued a single resolution, which was released two months after the incident. This resolution stated that the matter should be addressed at a lower level, and it respectfully recommended that the supervisors of both parties resolve the conflict at their respective levels. However, this recommendation is challenging, as the case had already been escalated to the college's Grievance Machinery Committee due to the failure to resolve it at the lower levels. The committee's decision to refer the case back to the initial level not only undermines the escalation process but also adds confusion and complexity to the situation, rather than providing a resolution.

The issue surrounding the responsibility of initiating the grievance process—referred to here as the “battle of who files the file”—could have been avoided had the head of the organization, the Human Resources Office, or any appropriate authority acted promptly to address the conflict upon receipt of the initial complaint. The delay in addressing the issue has resulted in a protracted process that continues to exacerbate the emotional distress of the aggrieved party. Even after two months, Ms. Tubos remains uninformed about the status or progress of her complaint, if any exists. While both parties continue to perform their duties professionally, there remains a palpable sense of discomfort and awkwardness during interactions, particularly when they encounter each other in shared spaces. During this prolonged period of inaction, individuals within the State College who are aware of the

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incident have begun to form opinions, take sides, and, in some cases, engage in gossip and negative discourse. This environment has contributed to psychological distress not only for the complainant but also for Mr. Lamoste, further complicating the workplace dynamics and the resolution process.

Finally, on December 11, 2018, a meeting was convened involving Ms. Tubos and Mr. Lamoste, along with their respective supervisors, and in the presence of the Human Resource Management Officer of the State College. The primary objective of the meeting was to facilitate a formal reconciliation process between the two parties.

Alternative Solutions

Alternative solutions are here presented that the head should have implemented to resolve the issue.

First, the parties and HR may have used their best efforts to amicably settle any dispute, controversy, or claim arising from the complaint. With the amicable settlement, a speedy and informal resolution of disputes will be made, and the confidentiality of the case and the avoidance of publicity will be less stressful. However, with an amicable settlement, parties are not compelled to continue negotiation or mediation, and it does not produce legal precedent.

The second is to have a conflict resolution. It moves beyond the interest-based settlement of the conflict and its dependence on the balance of power. It represents a strategic change in the relationship between the parties, expressed in terms of a pragmatic partnership, in which each side is persuaded that stable peace and cooperation are both in its own best interest and in the interest of the other. As described, it clearly represents a transformation of the relationship between the parties.

Third, HR may make initial talks with both parties to reconcile and resolve the conflict to the lowest possible level. Ideally, reconciliation prevents, once and for all, the use of the past as the seed of renewed conflict. It consolidates peace and breaks the cycle of violence.

Reconciliation, in this view, is a consequence of successful conflict resolution. It comes at the end of the process, with time. The test of a good agreement and of the process that generates it is its conduciveness to ultimate reconciliation.

Recommendation

Among the alternative solutions presented in the preceding section, the third one is strongly recommended. And based on all the possibilities, the writer upholds the right of Miss Tubos to fair and immediate action on her complaint. If the head of the organization decided to resolve the conflict in a simple reconciliation, immediate action must have been taken

through the HRM officer. This does not mean that reconciliation comes into play only after an agreement has been reached. Reconciliation is, after all, a process as well as an outcome; as such, it should ideally be set into motion from the beginning of a peace process and as an integral part of it.

Salin, D. (2009) study showed that the organizations surveyed relied heavily on reconciliatory measures for responding to workplace harassment and that punitive measures were seldom used. Findings indicated that personnel manager gender, size of municipality, use of “sophisticated” human resource management practices and having provided information and training to increase awareness about harassment all influence the organizational responses chosen. Martin Leiner (2018) reconciliation should be conceived as an overarching approach to conflict resolution that focuses on processes of rebuilding relationships. Its goal is to create ‘normal’ and trusting, and if possible, ‘good’ and peaceful relationships. Martin Leiner (2018) defends reconciliation as an alternative approach to conflict resolution against four criticisms.

A manager should manage conflicts effectively rather than suppress or avoid them. To manage them, a manager needs to ask 'What?' and 'Why?' - and not 'Who?' - to get at the root of a problem. In the process of resolving conflicts, many problems can be identified and solved by removing obstacles and creating a new environment of individual growth. If conflicts are not managed properly, they can be damaging, as they waste a lot of energy and time, and invoke tension, which reduces the productivity and creativity of those involved. Darling and Fogliasso(1999) conclude that it is impossible to eliminate conflict totally. Managers who try to eliminate conflict will not last long, while those who manage it well will typically experience both institutional benefits and personal satisfaction.

Moreover, in a conflict reconciliation, one must be able to describe the conflict from his/her perspective as objectively, clearly, and specifically as one can. Parties should talk honestly and directly to one another. They should be able to express their emotions, but still choose words carefully, keeping both courteous and professional. They must be able to explain how they feel and why. And that one must consider how they want to be viewed after the conflict is over.

While many people are uncomfortable talking about emotions in the workplace, it's better to express emotions in a forthright, appropriate way rather than having pent-up emotions gush out.

Conclusion

The concept of “setting aside” highlights a critical gap in organizational conflict management—where inaction or delayed response to issues results in compounding interpersonal tensions and systemic dysfunction. This study underscores that unresolved conflicts, when deprioritized or dismissed, do not simply fade but often evolve into more

complex challenges that affect morale, productivity, and institutional integrity. By examining a scenario adapted from a prior case study, the research demonstrates that failure to act promptly and decisively reflects not only procedural weakness but also a deeper neglect of employee well-being and organizational mission. Therefore, establishing clear, responsive, and accountable mechanisms for addressing internal disputes is essential. Ensuring that no concern is “set aside” without due consideration is key to fostering a healthy, transparent, and values-driven workplace.

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