



Employee Coping Strategies in Dealing with Workplace Conflict

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ABSTRACT

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Work conflict is an inevitable reality in modern organizations, especially in the digital era full of pressure and structural dynamics. This study aims to explore employees' coping strategies in dealing with work conflict. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were obtained through in-depth interviews with three informants who were purposively selected based on their position, length of service, and conflict involvement. The results of thematic analysis revealed three main categories of coping strategies: problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and avoidance-oriented coping. The choice of strategy is greatly influenced by individual perceptions of conflict, social support, and organizational culture. Appropriate coping strategies have been shown to play a role in maintaining psychological stability, increasing productivity, and preventing burnout. These findings contribute to the development of coping strategy theory in the context of work conflict and provide practical implications for HR management policies that are oriented towards employee psychological well-being.

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INTRODUCTION

Workplace conflict is a prevalent and intricate issue in many organizations, especially in government-owned enterprises. The importance of studying conflict management within these contexts cannot be overstated (Chu et al., 2022; An et al., 2022; Ervits et al., 2023). Conflict often arises due to various factors such as overlapping roles, communication barriers, and differences in work styles (Vuchkovski et al., 2023; Ndraha, 2023; Oham et al., 2024). These tensions can significantly affect employees' mental health and productivity, influencing the organization's overall performance (Chen et al., 2022; Maryani et al., 2024). The challenge becomes more pronounced in the face of rapid digital transformation and increasing performance demands. As organizations strive to adapt to technological advancements, employees are expected to meet higher expectations with fewer resources and support. Consequently, addressing workplace conflict is crucial for maintaining a healthy and efficient work

environment. Researching coping strategies that employees use to manage conflict is essential for enhancing their resilience and overall well-being. This study contributes to this understanding by identifying the most effective strategies and exploring how they can be implemented to foster a more harmonious workplace.

In government-owned profit organizations, like many other large entities, workplace conflict is an ongoing issue that is often underaddressed. As organizations evolve and become more technologically advanced, they face significant challenges related to employee roles, communication practices, and stress management. Tensions arise when employees struggle to navigate the demands of their roles amidst organizational changes, leading to unresolved conflicts. This issue is compounded when there are inadequate support systems in place to help employees deal with stress or conflict, which in turn impacts the organization's ability to function optimally. The absence of clear conflict resolution frameworks and insufficient training on managing workplace stress exacerbate these problems, resulting in negative consequences for both individual employees and the organization as a whole. Therefore, it is crucial to understand how coping strategies can be utilized effectively to manage these conflicts and improve employee resilience.

In practice, many employees within government-owned profit organizations experience ongoing workplace stress due to inadequate conflict resolution mechanisms. Employees report that changes in job roles, increased digitalization, and unclear communication often trigger conflicts. These situations create psychological strain, particularly when employees feel that their concerns are not being heard or addressed. A significant number of employees are reluctant to express their grievances due to fear of repercussions or a lack of effective platforms for communication. Furthermore, many organizations still have limited resources for providing psychological support, leaving employees to deal with interpersonal issues on their own. This phenomenon not only affects individual well-being but also impacts team dynamics, job satisfaction, and overall productivity. Addressing these challenges requires a deep understanding of how employees cope with conflict and how organizations can create an environment that supports healthier conflict resolution strategies.

Previous research on workplace conflict has focused extensively on the sources of conflict, such as role ambiguity, communication issues, and organizational change. Scholars like Irwan (2024) have examined how these factors contribute to heightened tensions in the workplace. In terms of coping strategies, Veisi et al., (2024) identified three main types: problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and avoidance-oriented coping. Further studies by Skinner et al. (2013) and Giorgi et al. (2020) have reinforced the validity of this

framework in the workplace setting, confirming that employees often use a combination of these strategies to navigate conflict. However, these studies often focus on individual coping mechanisms without delving deeply into how organizations can facilitate these processes. This research gap highlights the need for studies that explore not only the strategies employees use but also how organizational structures and policies can support these strategies to improve overall workplace harmony.

Although prior studies have contributed valuable insights into individual coping strategies, a comprehensive understanding of organizational interventions remains underexplored. Most research tends to address conflict management from the perspective of the individual employee, leaving out the role of organizational culture and management practices in conflict resolution. Research by Yang et al. (2020) and Tugade & Fredrickson (2020) highlights how emotional support and communication channels can influence coping outcomes, yet these studies often overlook the organizational responsibility in facilitating these coping mechanisms. This gap is critical, as organizational factors such as leadership style, communication training, and conflict resolution frameworks can either empower or hinder employees' ability to manage workplace conflicts. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by examining how organizational practices can enhance employee coping strategies, ultimately leading to better conflict management outcomes.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on the organizational support for coping strategies within government-owned profit organizations. While existing research has identified the individual coping strategies that employees employ in response to conflict, there is a lack of focus on how organizations can create environments that promote these strategies. This research will address this gap by investigating the role of leadership, communication policies, and support systems in facilitating effective conflict resolution strategies. By emphasizing organizational responsibility, this study introduces a new perspective on conflict management, suggesting that organizations should not only provide tools for individual coping but also foster an environment that supports these efforts holistically. This state-of-the-art approach will contribute significantly to the field by highlighting the importance of integrating organizational practices with individual coping strategies to achieve long-term success.

The central research problem of this study is how coping strategies in the workplace can be enhanced through organizational support in the context of a government-owned profit organization. This study argues that organizational support plays a crucial role in enhancing employees' ability to cope with workplace conflicts effectively. By examining how coping strategies are influenced by organizational factors, the study contributes to a deeper

understanding of conflict management within the workplace. The findings will provide insights into the types of support organizations can offer, such as communication training, emotional management resources, and leadership strategies, which can help mitigate the negative effects of conflict. Ultimately, the research aims to offer practical recommendations for organizations to implement strategies that not only resolve conflicts but also promote resilience and well-being among employees. This contribution is essential for organizations looking to foster a more supportive and productive work environment, particularly in the context of ongoing digital transformation and high-performance demands.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological research design (Alhazmi et al., 2022). The phenomenological approach was chosen because it aims to understand the subjective experiences of individuals related to the phenomenon of conflict in the workplace and the coping strategies used to deal with it (Jedličková et al., 2022). This approach provides space for researchers to explore the meaning given by individuals to their experiences and how they respond to and overcome problems that arise in the work environment. This is very relevant to dig deeper into understanding coping strategies in conflicts in large organizations such as government-owned companies. This type of research was chosen because phenomenology allows researchers to gain a deep and detailed understanding of the subjective experiences of informants, as well as to reveal the essence of these experiences in their daily lives at work. Through this approach, researchers can see the perspective of individuals experiencing conflict without being limited to objective factors alone so that they can produce a more holistic insight into the dynamics that occur in the field.

The data collection technique in this study used semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted with three key informants who were selected purposively based on their experiences in dealing with conflict in the workplace and their roles in the organization. The informants were selected to ensure that the data obtained came from individuals who had relevant experience related to the phenomenon being studied so that they could provide an in-depth perspective on the issue being studied. In addition, observation and documentation were also used to complement interviews and obtain more comprehensive information.

The data analysis technique used in this study was thematic analysis, which followed the steps proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis process began with open coding, where researchers identified relevant pieces of data and labeled them. Next, categories were formed based on similarities in themes found in the data. These categories identified core themes related to the

experience of conflict and coping strategies used by employees in the workplace. This thematic analysis allowed researchers to understand patterns in the data and reveal deeper meanings about how individuals deal with conflict in organizations. Data validity was maintained through source triangulation and member checking to ensure that the researcher's interpretation of the data was accurate and based on the informants' experiences.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Coping Strategies Focus on Problem Solving

Problem-focused coping strategies are approaches that individuals use to deal with conflict by seeking direct solutions to the problems that arise, such as through negotiation, role clarification, or changing work patterns. This strategy aims to reduce tension or overcome obstacles in the workplace in a concrete and rational way.

One informant (X1) explained that when faced with conflict over the division of tasks, he often held meetings with coworkers to discuss the division of work clearly and fairly. He felt that direct and open discussions were the best way to overcome his confusion regarding overlapping roles. In this way, he was able to reduce misunderstandings and reach better agreements. Likewise, Informant (X4) also emphasized the importance of clear communication in resolving conflict. He spoke about an experience where he faced tension related to differences in the way his division worked with another division. According to him, the best solution was to create more structured and clear work procedures, and ensure that all parties understood their respective roles.

The researcher noted that in some cases, managing meetings facilitated by superiors or a team of managers could improve communication between coworkers, especially in solving problems that arose from unclear roles. Based on observations, although problem-solving strategies are effective, sometimes there are difficulties in maintaining open communication due to stress factors or work activities that hinder regular discussions.

From the data above, it can be understood that coping strategies that focus on problem solving are effective in reducing tension in work conflicts, but their implementation requires support from superiors and an environment that is conducive to open communication. By holding regular and clear discussions, employees can minimize miscommunication and optimize the division of tasks within the organization.

The pattern that is seen is that conflicts that occur due to role incompatibility can be resolved with an approach that prioritizes open dialogue and a clearer restructuring of the division of tasks. Therefore, organizations need

to support open communication among team members to resolve problems efficiently.

Coping Strategies Focusing on Emotional Support

Coping strategies focusing on emotional support involve seeking help or support from coworkers, superiors, or family to manage feelings that arise from work conflicts. This includes talking to someone you trust to relieve stress or seeking comfort in sharing your feelings.

One informant (X2) shared his experience when he felt stressed due to high work pressure. He stated that he often talked to his colleagues after work hours to get emotional support. In this way, he felt better because he felt heard and understood by people who had similar experiences. Furthermore, the leader (X3) shared how emotional support from his superiors really helped him in dealing with conflicts with colleagues. When there was tension between him and the team, his superiors gave him the opportunity to talk about his feelings and concerns, which helped relieve tension and restore work motivation.

In the observations conducted, the researcher found that employees who had access to emotional support tended to feel calmer and were able to deal with conflicts in a more controlled manner. This reflects the importance of the presence of superiors or colleagues who can provide a sense of security and psychological support to reduce the negative impact of conflict. The data shows that emotional support plays a key role in reducing the psychological impact of work conflict. Having a place to share feelings with other trusted parties helps employees reduce anxiety and relieve existing tensions.

The pattern that emerged was that employees who had emotional support were better able to manage their feelings related to conflict in the workplace. Therefore, organizations should consider providing platforms or channels that support employees' emotional needs as part of their conflict management strategy.

Avoidance-Focused Coping Strategies

Avoidance coping strategies are when individuals choose to avoid conflict by reducing direct interaction with the parties involved in the conflict. This can include withdrawing from the situation or avoiding conversations about the issue at hand.

One employee (X5) revealed that he often chooses to avoid further discussions with coworkers who have different views. He feels that avoiding direct confrontation is the best way to keep the mood stable and avoid further escalation of the conflict. One staff (X6) shared that when facing a conflict over resource allocation, he chooses to reduce his involvement in meetings involving

the parties involved in the debate. He prefers to focus on his work and avoids discussing the ongoing conflict.

The researcher observed that although avoidance can provide "temporary peace", employees who adopt this strategy tend to postpone solving deeper problems. This can lead to a buildup of tension that will negatively impact relationships between coworkers in the long run. Avoidance may provide a short-term solution for individuals who feel unprepared or unwilling to face direct conflict. However, this strategy tends to neglect solving deeper problems and can cause the same problems to recur in the future.

Although the avoidance strategy can reduce tension in the short term, it does not address the root of the problem and often worsens the situation in the long run. Therefore, organizations need to provide training and support to help employees deal with conflict in a more constructive way.

Coping Strategy Using Spiritual Solution-Seeking

Coping strategies based on spiritual solution-seeking refer to seeking peace through spiritual or religious aspects in response to work conflict. This can include praying, meditating, or connecting with spiritual values to find inner peace. One Informant (X3) shared her experience in dealing with interpersonal conflict at work by using prayer as a tool to calm herself. She felt that praying gave her peace of mind and helped her to see the problem from a more positive perspective, without involving excessive emotions. Furthermore, one of the leaders (X1) explained that she often relies on the principles of her religion in dealing with conflict. When feeling stressed by tension at work, she seeks peace by talking to a spiritual leader or doing self-reflection based on her religious teachings.

Researchers noted that the use of spiritual strategies in dealing with conflict tended to have positive outcomes for employees who had strong religious beliefs. They were able to deal with conflict more calmly and not get carried away by feelings, and felt more empowered to accept differences.

A spiritual approach helps employees cope with the emotional tension caused by conflict. With spiritual beliefs, employees feel that they can deal with conflict more wisely, calm themselves down, and reduce the negative impact of stress that arises. The pattern found was that spiritual coping strategies were effective for those who had strong religious beliefs, and could help them to stay calm and focused even when facing conflict. Therefore, organizations need to support diversity in employee coping approaches by providing space for them to use strategies that are in accordance with their personal beliefs.

Discussion

The discussion of the results of this study refers to the findings related to coping strategies used by employees in dealing with conflict in the workplace in government organizations. The findings of this study are in line with existing theories in the literature, especially those related to the types of coping strategies as proposed by Nagy (2023), who divide coping strategies into problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and avoidance-oriented coping. The findings indicating the use of problem-focused coping strategies in dealing with work conflicts in this organization are also in line with the findings in research by Uzonwanne (2023) which show that employees involved in conflict are more likely to use a rational approach to solving problems that arise. However, the findings of this study also show the importance of emotional support from coworkers and superiors, which is not fully focused on in previous literature, which tends to emphasize more on individual mechanisms in dealing with conflict. Another interesting finding is the use of avoidance-oriented coping strategies found in some employees.

This is in accordance with previous research which revealed that avoidance is often chosen by individuals when they feel they have no control over the situation at hand, or when they feel the conflict cannot be resolved immediately. However, in the context of this study, avoidance is seen as a temporary solution, which can worsen tensions in the long run, and this is also reflected in the existing literature. The implication of this finding is that avoidance strategies can indeed reduce stress in certain conflict situations, but if applied continuously, it can cause greater problems in interpersonal relationships within the organization.

In addition, the emotional support-based approach (emotion-focused coping) found in this study, where employees seek support from colleagues or superiors, also has similarities with the study by Chang (2024). Emotional support serves to reduce anxiety levels and help employees feel more appreciated and understood, which is directly related to improving their psychological well-being. The theoretical implication of this finding is the importance of recognizing emotional factors in dealing with workplace conflict, which is often overlooked in many conflict management theories that emphasize practical and rational solutions. Practically, this finding suggests that organizations need to provide more open communication channels and support employees' emotional well-being to minimize the negative impacts of conflict.

One of the things that distinguishes this study from the existing literature is the emphasis on the use of spiritual solutions to resolve conflict. Several employees in this study used spiritual approaches, such as praying or consulting a spiritual leader, as a way to cope with the stress caused by conflict in the

workplace. The existing literature on coping strategies focuses more on rational or emotional mechanisms of individuals, but pays less attention to the role of spirituality in helping individuals cope with challenges in the workplace. This finding adds a new dimension to the study of workplace conflict, which should pay more attention to the diversity in how employees manage stress and the differences in coping approaches that individuals receive based on their personal backgrounds.

The practical implication of this finding is that organizations, especially those operating in culturally and religiously diverse contexts, need to consider a more inclusive approach to dealing with conflict. Organizations can provide spaces for employees to access emotional support, whether from coworkers, superiors, or through spiritual channels that can help them manage stress and improve well-being. On the theoretical side, this study highlights the importance of understanding more holistic coping strategies, which include both psychological and spiritual elements in dealing with conflict, and how this can lead to the development of more adaptive and effective conflict management models.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study shows that coping strategies used by employees in dealing with workplace conflict in government organizations include a variety of approaches, including problem solving, emotional support, avoidance, and seeking spiritual solutions. The results of this study support existing theories regarding the types of coping strategies used in the context of conflict, but also add new insights into the importance of emotional support and spiritual aspects in managing conflict in the workplace. These findings underline the importance of understanding the diversity of approaches to dealing with conflict, which involves not only rational solutions but also psychological and spiritual factors that can strengthen individual resilience in organizations.

Practically, organizations need to create an environment that supports various coping strategies by providing effective communication channels, training to improve emotional skills, and space for employees to access spiritual support according to their backgrounds. This study also provides theoretical contributions by highlighting the need for a more holistic and adaptive approach to conflict management, which considers emotional and spiritual dimensions in an effort to improve employee well-being. The implementation of these findings can help organizations design more effective policies to manage conflict, improve employee relationships, and strengthen work productivity.

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