Original Research Article

Common Reasons for Conflicts and Common Conflict Resolution Techniques Used: Findings of 8 Years of Secondary and Primary Research Studies

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Abstract

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The paper, a summary of 8 years of research (2015-2023) on conflict management, presents the common reasons for conflicts and common conflict resolution techniques used by employees at all levels in an organization based on secondary research and also an empirical investigation. The Macro Objective of the Research is to Generalize the Reasons for Conflicts and Conflict Resolution Techniques Used at Employee, Manager and Top Management Level using Author's Previous 3 Secondary Research Studies and Current Primary Research Study by finding the Top-3 Common Reasons for Conflicts and Top-3 Common Conflict Resolution Techniques Used at all levels of Employees. The 3 different secondary research studies are conducted (2015-2023) at Employee level, Manager Level, Top Management Level to identify Top-5 Reasons for Conflicts and Top-5 Conflict Resolution Techniques used by Employees, Managers and Top Management Respectively. Top-5 items are identified based on reference count (number of citations) in literature in each of these research works. Later on, in 4th Paper (2023) Common Top-3 Reasons for Conflicts, Common Top-3 Conflict Resolution Techniques are Identified based on the 3 published secondary research works. This current work is primary study conducted on 68 respondents; and Primary Research Findings are Compared with Secondary Research findings; further top-3 common reasons for conflicts and top-3 conflict resolution techniques used are identified at all levels of employees in an organization. Overall, the paper presents the Top-3 common reasons for conflicts among employees, project managers, and top management; and top-3 common conflict resolution techniques used by employees, project managers and top management. Based on Secondary & Primary Research Studies, the Top-3 common reasons for conflicts identified are Resources, Value Differences, Personality Differences; and Top-3 conflict resolution techniques used are Avoidance, Compromise, Confrontation/Problem Solving at all levels of employees.

Keywords: Conflict Management, Conflict Resolution Technique, Reasons for Conflict, Employee, Project Manager, Top Management Team (TMT)

INTRODUCTION

Since evolution of Civilization, human kind entered into several challenges, risks, troubles, issues, dis-agreements, conflicts for the survival. As Charles Dorwin told, the Fittest will be Surviving; the adoptable will be Surviving; this adoptability, fitting to the environment happens by application of right decisions, applying right techniques in case of conflicts, and making the right moves in day to day operations. The same thing is with the Organizational Environment. The adoptable, fittest, who deals with conflicts in a right way, who executes the tasks and who cooperates will be surviving longer in an organizational environment. As the organizational tasks, organizational product development, organizational business process execution, customer support involves people interaction both horizontally and also vertically; or even diagonally in case of challenges/opportunities. When multiple levels of employees are involved in serving customer, each role carries certain levels of authority, responsibility, power, strength, skills, impor-tance in the organization. Employees at all levels tries to use all these aspects collectively by combing communication in executing the organizational tasks which have inherent interdependence nature.

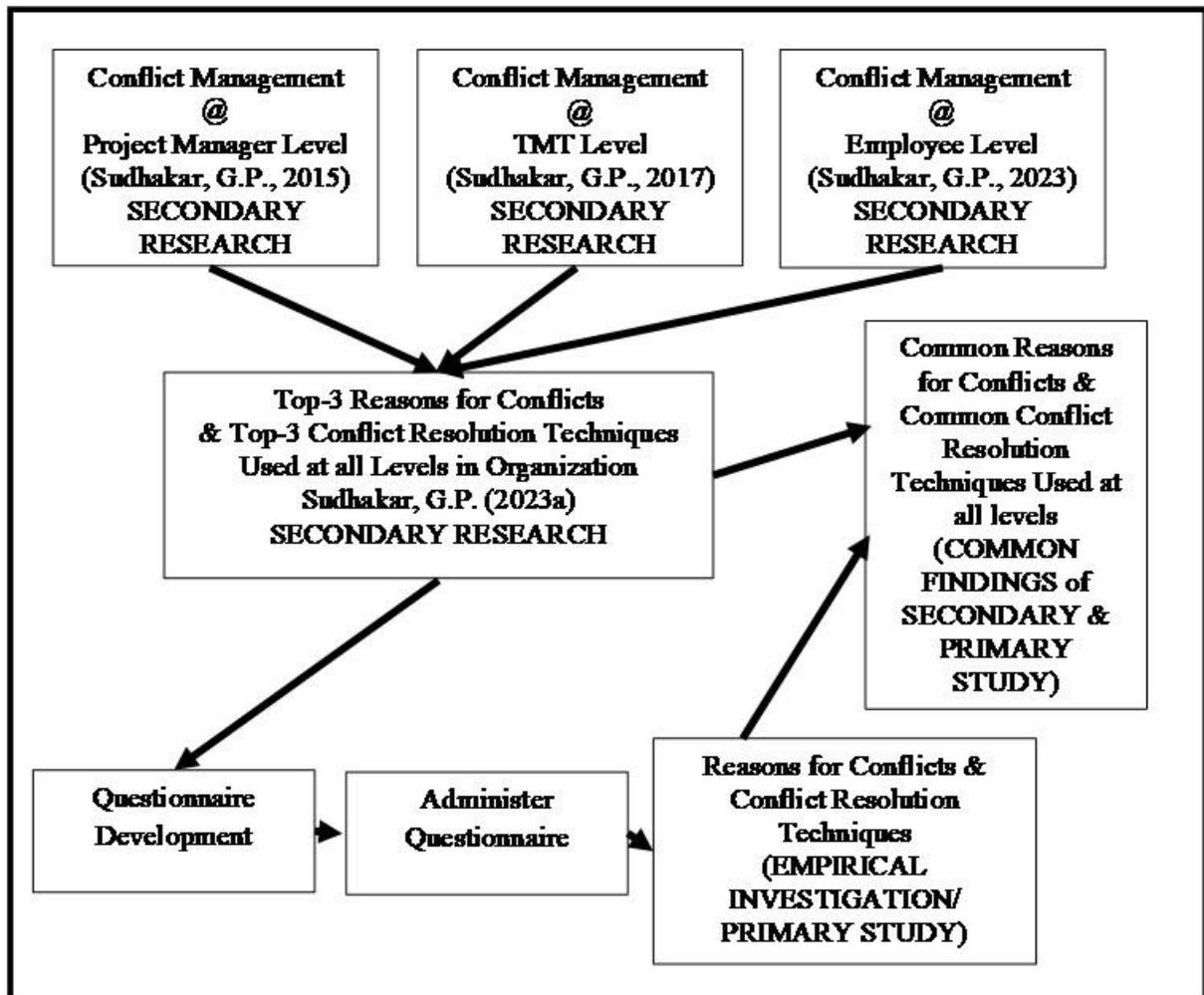As the performance levels, attitudes, skill levels,

Figure 1. Research Methodology of Current Conflict Management Research

behaviours vary from employee to employee; and also they have got individual priorities they get into conflicts in fulfilling their priorities and also to showcase their performance to their supervisors. In this process, employees at different levels give different levels of importance to different things in organization. In fulfilling their responsibilities, priorities, interests, they enter into conflict. This specific paper presents the consolidated findings of common reasons for conflicts and common conflict resolution techniques used at employee, manager, and top management level based on secondary and primary research studies.

Research Objective

Following are the Major Research Objectives:
1. The objective of the research is to conduct empirical investigation to find the top-5 reasons for conflicts among employees, project managers and top management team members; and top-5 conflict resolution techniques used by employees, project managers and top management team members in an organizational environment.
2. The objective is also to find the common reasons for conflicts and common conflict resolution techniques used at all levels in the organization based on common findings of secondary research and empirical/primary research.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current research work is a summary of 8 years of the Author's research work (2015-2023) on Conflict Management (see Figure-1). So far Research on Conflict Management at Employees Level (2023), at Project Managers Level (2015), and at Top Management Level (2017) is carried out. Also in (2023a) common findings of reasons for conflicts and conflict resolution techniques at Employee level, Manager Level and Top Management is

Carried Out. This current research work presents the findings from primary survey conducted at all levels of employees; and also the common findings of both secondary studies and this current primary study. Finally, this current work presents the top-3 common reasons for conflicts and top-3 conflict resolution techniques used at all level of employees based on findings of both secondary and primary studies. Following are the details of the earlier Four secondary research studies.

Sudhakar, G.P. (2015) finds the reasons for conflicts at project manager level and conflict resolution techniques used by project managers in an organization. Sudhakar, G.P. (2017) finds reasons for conflicts at top management team member level and conflict resolution techniques used by top management team members. Sudhakar, G.P. (2023) finds the reasons for conflicts at employee level and conflict resolution techniques used by employees in an organization. Sudhakar, G.P. (2023a) presents the common reasons for conflicts at all levels (employee, project manager and top management team member) in organization and common conflict resolution techniques used at all levels in organization based on the common findings of Sudhakar, G.P. (2015), Sudhakar, G.P. (2017) and Sudhakar, G.P. (2023). Further this current research paper presents the empirical investigation/survey findings based on questionnaire developed using Sudhakar, G.P. (2023a). The paper also finds the common top-3 reasons for conflicts and top-3 conflict resolution techniques used by all levels of employees based on common findings from empirical investigation and secondary research presented in Sudhakar, G.P. (2023a).

Literature Review

The basic idea is derived from following four publications of the author.

Paper-1: Identifies The Reasons for Conflicts in Employees + Conflict Resolution Techniques used by Employees in an Organization
1. Sudhakar, G.P. (2023), *"A Review of Conflict Resolution Techniques Used by Employees"*; *Submitted to an International Conference;*
Paper-2: identified the reasons for Conflicts in Project Environment + Conflict Resolution Techniques used by Project Managers:
2. Sudhakar, G.P. (2015), "A Review of Conflict Management Techniques in Projects", *Brazilian Journal of Operations and Production Management,* Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 214-232, ISSN: 2237-8960. (Impact Factor:1.6025)
Paper-3: identified the reasons for Conflicts in Top Management Teams + Conflict Resolution Techniques used by Top Management Teams:

3. Sudhakar, G.P. (2017), "The Role of Conflicts in Top Management Teams", *Proceedings of International Conference on "Innovative and Sustainable Business Practices"*, Paper Presented at Department of Management Studies, **University of Madras**, 10th February, 2017, Published in *International Journal of Business Intelligence and Innovations,* Special Volume, Issue 4, pp. 608-616, February 2017, ISSN: 2348-4705.
Paper-4: specifies the Common findings of Secondary Research on Conflicts at Different Levels in Organization such as Employee, Project Manager and Top Management Team Member (TMT)
4. Sudhakar, G.P. (2023a), "Top-3 Reasons for Conflicts and Top-3 Conflict Resolution Techniques Used by Employees at All Levels in Organizations", *Paper Presented at International Conference on "Climate Finance and Sustainable Development-Risks and Rewards (ICCFSD-2023)"*, *University College of Commerce and Business Management,* **Osmania University, Hyderabad, India,** *August 10-11, 2023.*

Questionnaire Development

Based on Paper-4 (Sudhakar, 2023a), Table-1 and Table-2 presents the common findings of three different secondary research studied out at employee level, manager level and top management level, which was presented in Paper-4.

Based on Paper-4, a Questionnaire with Common Reasons for Conflicts and Common Conflict Resolution Techniques used by Employees, Managers and Top Management Team Members (TMTs) is developed for conducting survey on working executives.

Following are the Questionnaire Items:
1. Please Indicate Your Position in the Organization: (Radio Button)
- Top Management
- Manager
- Employee

2. Please Tick Mark (√) All the Reasons because of which You Get into Conflicting Situations in the Organization:
[Tick Mark "√" All That Apply]

Differences in Project/Task Goals
Resources
Cultural Differences
Personality Differences
Organization/Team Related Structures
Value Differences

Table 1. Common Reasons for Conflicts Among Employees, Managers and TMTs

SL.No.	Paper-1 Top-5 Reasons for Conflicts in Employees Ref: Sudhakar (2023)	Reference Count#	Paper-2 Top-5 Reasons for Conflicts among Project Managers Ref: Sudhakar, G.P. (2015)	Reference Count#	Paper-3 Top-5 Reasons for Conflicts in TMTs Ref: Sudhakar, G.P. (2017)	Reference Count#
1.	Resource Issues	10	Shared/Common Resources	14	Value Differences	4
2.	Ineffective/Poor Communication	10	Differences in Project Goals	12	Resources	4
3.	Personality Differences	10	Cultural Differences	10	Attitudes / Personality	3
4.	Mismatching Goals	8	Value Differences	10	Structures	3
5.	Value Differences	7	Personality Differences	10	Lack of Trust in TMT	2

Table 2. Common Conflict Resolution Techniques Used by Employees, Managers and TMTs

SL.No.	Paper-1 Top-5 Conflict Resolution Techniques Used by Employees Ref: Sudhakar (2023)	Reference Count#	Paper-2 Top-5 Conflicts Resolution Techniques used by Project Managers Ref: Sudhakar, G.P. (2015)	Reference Count#	Paper-3 Top-5 Conflict Resolution Techniques used by TMTs Ref: Sudhakar, G.P. (2017)	Reference Count#
1.	Avoiding	14	Avoidance	27	Avoidance	9
2.	Compromise	13	Compromising	26	Compromising	7
3.	Collaborating	12	Confronting/Problem Solving	17	Withdrawal	5
4.	Accommodating	10	Accommodating	13	Collaboration	5
5.	Confronting/ Problem Solving	8	Smoothing	13	Confrontation	5

Lack of Trust
Ineffective/Poor Communication

3. Please Tick Mark (√)All the Techniques You Use to Resolve Conflicts in the Organization:
[Tick Mark "√" All That Apply]

Accommodating
Withdrawal
Avoiding
Confrontation/Problem Solving
Smoothing
Compromising
Collaborating

Data Analysis

For an empirical investigation, the questionnaire is administered on respondents by providing the Quest-ionnaire link in Google Forms. The questionnaire link is provided in discussion groups such as MTC Global, WhatsApp groups such as MDP Society, Indian Mgt. Professors, MDIM_ICCBP-2023, and my LinkedIn Contacts, etc. Total 68 responses were received. As the number of questions were only 3, there is no missing data in the received data. Out of 68 respondents, 90% of the respondents are from India and 10% of the respondents are from USA and Australia. The respon-dents are from industries such as software industry, construction industry, education industry, steel sector, etc. Out of 68 respondents, 15 are top management (22%), 17 are managers (25%), and 36 are entry level employees having no supervisory responsibility (53% of respondents) (see Figure-2). Figure-3 and Figure-4 present the responses of respondents.

Research Findings based on Empirical Investigation

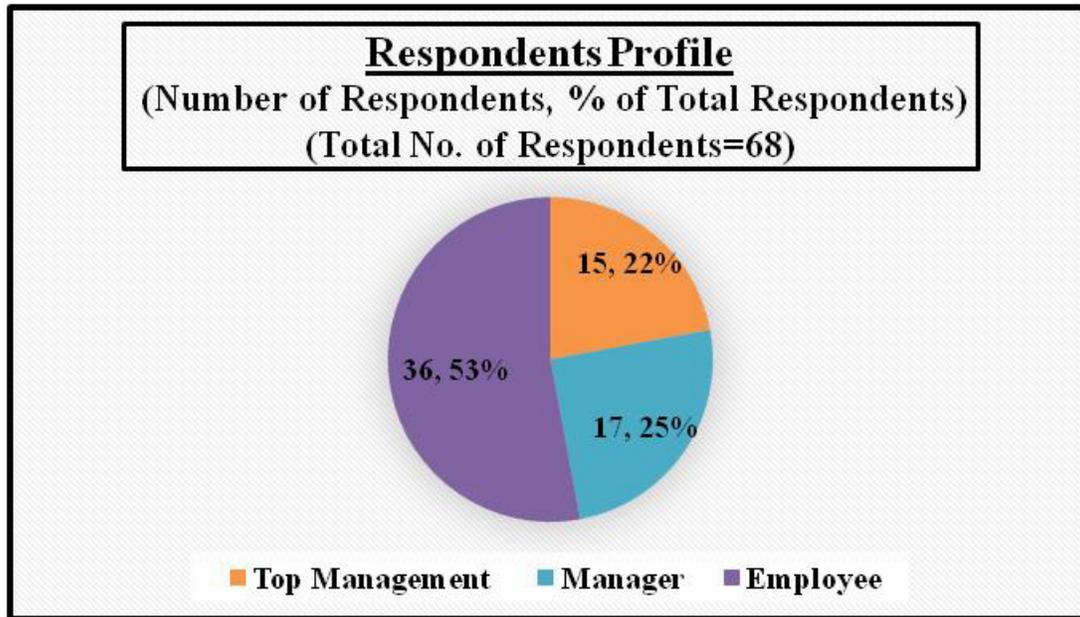According to respondents responses, Table-3 presents

Respondents Profile
(Number of Respondents, % of Total Respondents)
(Total No. of Respondents=68)

15, 22%

17, 25%

36, 53%

■ Top Management   ■ Manager   ■ Employee

Figure 2. Respondents Profile

Reasons for Conflicts for Respondents
(No. of Respondents)

21 — Differences in Project/Task Goals
29 — Resources
13 — Cultural Differences
40 — Personality Differences
31 — Value Differences
33 — Lack of Trust
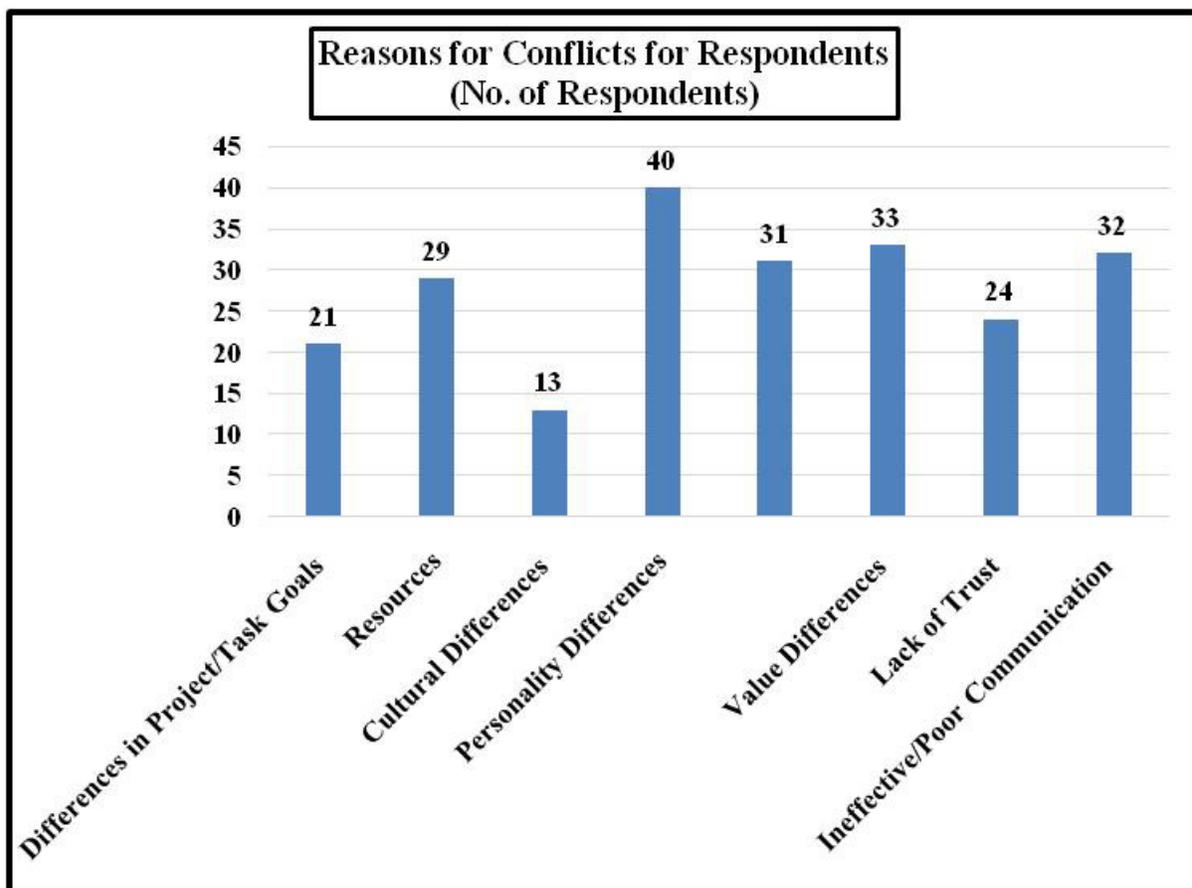24 — Ineffective/Poor Communication
32

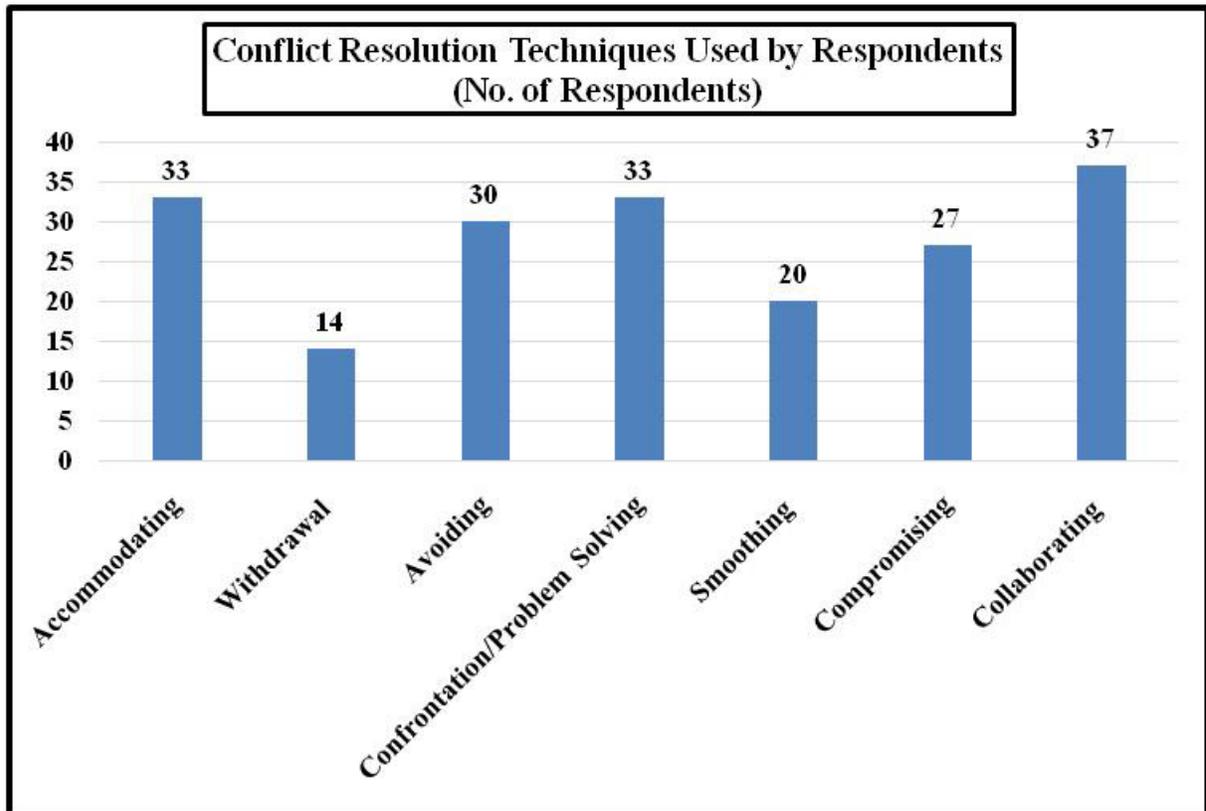**Figure 3.** Reasons for Conflicts w.r.to. Respondents Feedback

Figure 4. Conflict Resolution Techniques Used by Respondents

top-5 reasons for conflicts; and Table-4 presents top-5 conflict resolution techniques used by all levels of employees.

Common Findings of Both Secondary Research and Primary Research

Table-5 and Table-6 presents the consolidated findings of previous secondary research studies and the current primary research study.

In Summary, in organizational environment, the Top-3 common reasons for conflicts at all levels of employees include Resources, Value Differences, Personality Differences (see Table-7). Top-3 conflict resolution techniques used at all levels of employees include Avoiding, Compromising, and Confrontation/Problem Solving (see Table-8).

Exclusive Findings based on Empirical Survey

Table-9 and Table-10 presents the responses of Employees, Managers, and Top Management. From

Table-9 and Table-10, following interpretations can be drawn:

a. For Employees: Usually Employees get into conflicts because of Personality Differences and Value Differences. The employees widely use Avoidance technique to resolve conflicts to compare with any other technique.

b. For Managers: At managers level, the main reason they get into conflicts is the Personality Differences. The managers use Collaboration technique widely to compare with any other technique.

c. For Top Management: The main reason they get into Conflicts is the Organization/Task related Structures. The Top Management is mostly using Accommodating technique more frequently than any other technique of conflict resolution.

Scope for Further Research

Basically, there will be slight variations between secondary research top-3 reasons for conflicts and top-3 conflict resolution techniques to compare with primary/empirical research findings, (with respect to top

Table 3. Top-5 Reasons for Conflicts based on Empirical Investigation

SL. No.	Common Reasons for Conflicts at All Levels of Employees (based on Respondents Survey)	No. of Respondents (Out of Total 68 Respondents)	% of Respondents
1.	Personality Differences	40	58.8%
2.	Value Differences	33	48.5%
3.	Ineffective/Poor Communication	32	47.1%
4.	Organization/Team Related Structures	31	45.6%
5.	Resources	29	42.6%

Table 4. Top-5 Conflict Resolution Techniques based on empirical investigation

SL. No.	Common Conflict Resolution Techniques Used at All Levels of Employees (based on Respondents Survey)	No. of Respondents (Out of Total 68 Respondents)	% of Respondents
1.	Collaborating	37	54.1%
2.	Confrontation/Problem Solving	33	48.5%
3.	Accommodating	33	48.5%
4.	Avoiding	30	44.1%
5.	Compromising	27	39.7%

Table 5. Common Reasons for Conflicts at All Levels

Common Reasons for Conflicts

SL. NO.	Common Reasons for Conflicts at All Levels of Employees (based on Secondary Research)	SL. No.	Common Reasons for Conflicts at All Levels of Employees (based on Respondents Survey)
1.	**Resources**	1.	Personality Differences
2.	**Value Differences**	2.	Value Differences
3.	**Personality Differences**	3.	Ineffective/Poor Communication
4.	-	4.	Organization/Team Related Structures
5.	-	5.	Resources

Table 6. Common Conflict Resolution Techniques Used at All Levels

Common Conflict Resolution Techniques Used

SL. No.	Common Conflict Resolution Techniques Used at All Levels of Employees (based on Secondary Research)	SL. No.	Common Conflict Resolution Techniques Used at All Levels of Employees (based on Respondents Survey)
1.	**Avoiding**	1.	Collaborating
2.	**Compromising**	2.	Confrontation/Problem Solving
3.	**Confrontation/Problem Solving**	3.	Accommodating
4.	-	4.	Avoiding
5.	-	5.	Compromising

Table 7. Top-3 Reasons for Conflicts Based on Both Secondary & Empirical Research

SL. No.	Top-3 Reasons for Conflicts at All Levels of Employees (based on Secondary & Primary Research)
1.	Resources
2.	Value Differences
3.	Personality Differences

Table 8. Top-3 Conflict Resolution Techniques Used Based on Both Secondary & Empirical Research

SL. No.	Top-3 Conflict Resolution Techniques Used at All Levels of Employees (based on Secondary and Primary Research)
1.	Avoiding
2.	Compromising
3.	Confrontation/Problem Solving

Table 9. Respondents Reported Reasons for Conflicts

SL.No.	Encountered Reason for Conflicts	No. of Employees	No. of Managers	No. of Top Managers	Total No. of Respondents Tick (√) Marked
1.	Differences in Project/Task Goals	10	5	6	21
2.	Resources	13	8	8	29
3.	Cultural Differences	8	2	3	13
4.	Personality Differences	19	13	8	40
5.	Organization/Team Related Structures	13	6	12	31
6.	Value Differences	19	7	7	33
7.	Lack of Trust	11	6	7	24
8.	Ineffective/Poor Communication	17	7	8	32

Table 10. Respondents Used Conflict Resolution Technique

SL.No.	Conflict Resolution Technique Used	No. of Employees	No. of Managers	No. of Top Managers	Total No. of Respondents Tick (√) Marked
1.	Accommodating	12	9	12	33
2.	Withdrawal	8	4	2	14
3.	Avoiding	20	6	4	30
4.	Confrontation/Problem Solving	15	8	10	33
5.	Smoothing	8	6	6	20
6.	Compromising	14	9	4	27
7.	Collaborating	16	10	11	37

the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th positions of the reasons for conflicts/resolution techniques because the primary/ empirical data collected varies from country to country, and culture to culture. The cultural aspects such as Hofstede's six dimensions of culture such as Individualism vs. Collectivism, Uncertainty Avoidance, Power Distance, Masculinity vs. Femininity, Indulgence Vs. Restraint, Long Term Vs. Short Term Orientation, will have an effect on the way individuals look at the conflicts in an organization. Hence, my observation and also the data indicates that the conflict resolution techniques used and also the reasons for conflicts vary from country to country and also to culture to culture. Because, for

example, the resources being a source of conflict in country many not be an issue for conflict in another country having plenty of resources. Similarly, the cultural upbringing, religious beliefs, the value systems we are having, and the level of forgiveness in individuals have a lot to do in dealing with conflicts in not only organizational environment but also in larger society. Hence, for the research community across the world there is a lot to do in *Conflict Management* research.

Hence broader factors such as cultural, religious, values, beliefs, spiritual levels, physical stamina, level of forgiveness, level of aggression, level of confidence, level of support, financial situation, legal system complexity,

employment situation, power in society, strength of network having, family situation/challenges, all these factors effect an individual and the way he deals with the conflicts or even entering into conflict or disagreement. Thus in *Conflict Management,* there is a lot to do for research community. Not only this, my observation is conflict management is not studied in a wider or large scale at top management, board or CEO levels as well. I could hardly get the literature on how top management deals with conflicts, the reasons for conflicts at top management level. Hence, this area also has lot of potential to explore with respect to conflict management at CEO/Board/Top Management Level. At CEO level or Board level, only the prominent publications are from Harvard Business Publishing/Harvard University Press.

Another finding from this research is, the exclusive factors/reasons for conflict at employee level, manager level and top management levels are varying by 40% of the factors. That is 60% of the factors are common or 60% of the reasons for conflicts are common at all levels in the organization (3 out of 5 reasons for conflicts); remaining 40% of the reasons for conflicts are exclusive at their employment level in the organization for employees, managers and top managers. These exclusive factors can also be retrieved from Table-1 and Table-2 and further can be researched at employee, manager and top management level.

Implications for Industry

The findings in this current research are applicable across industries; the common reasons for conflicts at levels of employees in organizations include resources, value differences, and personality differences. Also the working community in organizations widely use conflict resolution approaches such as avoidance, compromise and confrontation/problem solving. These findings are much applicable to Indian industry because 90% of the respondents in this survey are from India. 10% of the respondents in the survey are from USA and Australia. Even if the findings vary from country to country, my observation is, less than 20% of the factor ordering varies from country to country. This is also because of cultural, religious and values variation from country to country. When we look at conflict resolution techniques in a collective way only rank ordering varies from country to country from multiple respondents perspective. Mostly all the countries use all the techniques as other countries are using. However, for a specific conflict, the resolution technique used or the action taken may entirely vary from country to country when we look at a single/particular conflict individually. This, phenomena is because different countries across the world have different legal systems; and as we discussed cultural, religious and value systems also vary from country to country. Hope, Readers enjoyed reading the paper. I also enjoyed particularly while writing the last four paragraphs.

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