

A study on Intrapersonal Conflict: Determining the Age Differences in Public Sector Organization

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Abstract

A research study on conflict is not a recent issue. There are lots of previous research have been done and discussed on the topic. Report on conflicts at the workplace have been published by many scholars that measure the conflicts among employees in different part of the world. However, in Malaysia, it is difficult to know about conflicts that occur at workplace especially on intrapersonal conflicts. Thus, this study aims to determine intrapersonal conflict among employee based on their age differences. Data from this study was collected using questionnaire from 250 respondents among public sector employees. They consisted of 60.4 percent female, 59.6 percent are between 21-30 years and 64.8 percent from respondents were undergraduate.

Key Words: Intrapersonal, Conflict, Age Differences, Employees, Public Sector, Malaysia.

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, many study have been conducted to identify conflicts at the workplace. It is difficult to know about conflicts occurred in organization particularly on intrapersonal conflicts.

The problem identified in this study exists because organizations continue to fall short in managing conflict in ways leading to positive outcomes (Jacobs, 2008). According to Dawson (2007), people in organization maybe afraid to face it and if they handle it poorly, it can make the problem more worse and grew. Conflict in organization is also significant to the loss of productivity, poor cooperation and, in the extreme situation; the organization might lose of good employees which finally leads to the loss of good customers (Thompson, 2008). Max Messmer & Lawrence Kahn (2006) stated that frustration towards a problem may be interpreted by someone else as anger or scorn. Their response may be to avoid working with the person, increasing the level of ongoing conflict. Besides, Guttman (2009) explained that conflicts can destroy morale, polarize co-worker and divert precious power from meeting organizational goals. Conflicts at the workplace or in organization have been done in different context, but not focusing on Malaysian environment and culture. This study is to see whether theory/model of conflict is applicable to our situation.

Study on intrapersonal conflict among employee in organization are relatively few if not none especially in the context of public service.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Generally, conflict handling skills are very significant for maintaining almost all human relationship, in either personal or working life (Montes, Rodríguez, & Serrano, 2012). Rao (2017) stated that conflicts occur due to countless reasons such as personality clashes, ego clashes, differences of opinions, cultural differences, perceptions, miscommunication, ambiguity in roles and responsibilities, stress, and scarcity of resources and others. Usually conflicts arise when there is a gap between the expectations and the realities. According to Jacobs (2008), conflict is a fundamental component of organizational life requiring individuals to consider whether to respond and how best to respond to conflict. It is also inevitable. Liu, Klein, and Jiang (2009) describes that conflicts is a pervasive phenomenon that came from jealousy, poor communication, user resistance, lack of understanding, frustration and low morale, personality diversity and different expectation. Jacobs (2008) explained conflicts as a collision of perceived disagreement, incompatibility, or charged energy patterns colliding due to the differences of interests, beliefs, or values that matter between two or more individuals or parties.

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Conflict exists when two or more individuals perceive differences and opposition between themselves and another individual about interests, beliefs, or values that matter to the individual. The disagreement may be real or merely perceived but it is psychologically felt by one of the parties. Moreover, Walker (2009) explained that conflicts can be a rather challenging risk area to mitigate because the inherently personal nature of conflicts of interest can make them difficult to detect and difficult to control.

People in organization explained that employees are having tense meeting, red faced supervisors and stressful encounter with colleagues when topic of workplace conflict is branched (Pace, 2008). CPP Inc. (2008) shares the report on people attitudes towards conflict at the workplace on full time employees at North America and Europe. 85 percent of employees reported dealing with conflict to some degree and 49 percent of respondents said personality clashes and warring egos were the primary causes of workplace conflict. 27 percent of employees have witnessed conflict morph into a personal attack, while 25 percent say that the avoidance of conflict resulted in sickness or absence from work. Additionally 85% of people change the way they approach conflict over the course of their working lives; they become more proactive and take it less personally as a result of experience (CPP Inc., 2008). In a new report by Gifford (2015), 45% of public sector employees report having had some kind of conflict compared with 38% of private sector employees in large organization with 500 or more employees. Therefore, it seems that as organizations grow in size, their complexity and structures can very quickly get in the way of resolving conflict swiftly and effectively. Additionally, Gifford (2015) explained that conflict is seen to be more common with one's superiors than more junior members of staff.

Based on Ozkaramanli, Desmet, and Özcan (2016), intrapersonal conflict are contradicting tendencies within an individual whereby it is a well-studied psychological phenomenon that represents an important aspect of the variety and complexity of human experience. Rahim (2001) explained intrapersonal conflict is also known as intra-individual or intra-psychic conflict that occurs when an organizational member is required to perform certain tasks and roles and it does not match with the individual expertise, interests, goals, and values. Herleman (2009) describes that factors such as age and self-efficacy, workplace factors such as role clarity and supervisor support, family/friends factors such as spouse adjustment, and environmental factors such as cultural distance and standard of living and adjustment are combined and called as intrapersonal conflict. Gifford (2015) found that the single most common contributor to conflict is differences in personality or styles of working, supporting a relational view of conflict. Moreover his study supports an issue-based view of conflict. That means, individual performance, target-setting and the level of support or resources are more important, being far more than employment contracts or promotions. According to Rahim (2001) intrapersonal conflicts at work can be categorized into three types namely; 1) Approach – Approach Conflict (deal when when a person has to choose between two attractive alternatives) 2) Approach – Avoidance Conflict (occured when a person has to deal with a situation that has both positive as well as negative aspects)

and 3) Avoidance– Avoidance Conflict (when each of the alternatives has negative consequences).

In term of age differences, scholar suggest that individuals within the same generational group or cohort, due to their shared experiences of key social events at critical life developmental stages, tend to share similar values, attitudes and behaviors which significantly affect their expectations about work and life in general (Smola and Sutton, 2002). Dwyer & Azevedo (2016) has illustrated the comparison of age differences of employees at work (Table 1).

Table 1. Differences of age groups at work

Generation Y	Generation X	Baby Boomers	Veterans
Seek feedback and expect consultation on issues which affect them.	Seek continual feedback and opportunities for autonomy.	Seek promotion through hard work and determination – driven to succeed	Seek formalized hierarchical structure with focused respect for organizational authority
Seek challenging work environment which stimulates a workplace identity and provide meaning.	Expect organizations to provide ongoing skills development opportunities.	Goal-oriented. Seeking to make a difference at work and in society.	and organizational commitment
Confident, self-assured and flexible in different tasks.	Achievement-oriented.	High ambition may lead to burnout.	Highly committed to the organization and its leaders. Seeking to give and receive loyalty and
Seeking opportunities to contribute and grow.	Seeking flexible work life in relation to own needs.	Willing to challenge authority, when he/she is a non-expert	to have long-term job security. Risk averse
Impatient and eager to voice their opinion.	Lack employer loyalty		Will not challenge the status quo
Will challenge authority when there is doubt	Will challenge the hierarchical decision- making structure or status quo		

It shows that each generation presents different challenges in managing their differences in attitudes and values, preferences regarding leadership and human resource practices, as well their responses to organizational change initiatives

METHODOLOGY

The data from this study was collected by using questionnaire. Respondents were asked to answer the entire questionnaire. A total of 250 public service employees were participated in this research. All respondents were from various department in

Putrajaya, Malaysia. Government staff at Putrajaya was chosen because it is the federal administrative centre of Malaysia.

FINDINGS/DISCUSSION

In this study, there were 60.4 percent (151) female and 39.6 percent (99) were males. In addition, most of respondents were between 21-30 years old (59.6 percent) and followed by respondents between 31-40 years old (21.6 percent). In term of level of education, the majority of respondents were undergraduate (64.8 percent) and only 3.2 percent completed post graduate level. As for governmental bodies, most of respondents were in grade 17-40 (65.6 percent) followed by officers who were in grade 41-54 (28.8 percent).

Table 2. Description of Demographic Profile

Variables		(n = 250)	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	99	39.6
	Female	151	60.4
Age	<20	11	4.4
	21-30	149	59.6
	31-40	54	21.6
	41-50	23	9.2
	51>	13	5.2
Education	Secondary	80	32.0
	Undergraduate	233	64.8
	Post Graduate	8	3.2
Grading Scheme	1-16	14	5.6
	17-40	164	65.6
	41-54	72	28.8

To determine whether dependent or independent significant difference existed in term of intrapersonal conflicts based on age differences, the researcher used one-way ANOVA to test the significant different. Age differences had been divided into 3 groups according to their age group (1= <20-30 years old, 2= 31-40 years old and 3= 41-51> years old). In this study, the assumptions of equal variances among the three groups were met by using Levene's test. There was a statistically significant different at $p < .05$ for the three age groups whereby $F = 5.057$ with significance of .007. The result also shows ETA Square with value of .039 and observed power of .815. Since the group size is not equal, Post-hoc tests on Scheffe were employed. The test showed that the mean score for <20-30 years old ($M=2.460$ $SD=.612$) was significantly different from 41-51> years old ($M=2.104$ $SD=.604$). The group of 31-40 years old ($M=2.305$ $SD=.718$) did not have significant different on either group of <20-30 years old or 41-51> years old. Hence, it could be indicated that the intrapersonal conflict varied based on the group of age.

Table 3. Post-Hoc Tests on Scheffe (Intrapersonal Conflict and Age)

Dependent Variable	(I) age	(J) age	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	Mean	Std. Deviation
Intrapersonal Conflict	<20-30	31-40	.155	.099	.301	2.460	.612
		41-51>	.356*	.117	.011		
	31-40	<20-30	-.155	.099	.301	2.305	.718
		41-51>	.201	.136	.339		
	41-51>	<20-30	-.356*	.117	.011	2.104	.604
		31-40	-.201	.136	.339		

Based on observed means.

The error term is Mean Square (Error) = .404.

*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

The results in Table 3 are supported with the prior research conducted by (Gifford, 2015) who found that conflict is seen to be more common with one's superiors than more junior members of staff. Additionally the study also reports that, public sector employees also possessed high grading scheme and hold a better position due to their experience at work. Since public sector employees does not changing to another job as compared to private sector, experience worker tend to be older. Thus, researchers believe that age difference is an important variable that strongly related to their group of grading scheme (start with 1, 17 and 41).

These results provide the evidence to support the hypotheses tested in this study. Table 4 presents the summary of the hypotheses.

Table 4. Summary of hypotheses testing

Hypotheses	Result
H1: There is a significant difference on intrapersonal conflict in term of age differences	
H1a : There is a significant difference on intrapersonal conflict between <20-30 years and 31-40 years	Rejected
H1b: There is a significant difference on intrapersonal conflict between 31-40 years and 41-51> years.	Rejected
H1b : There is a significant difference on intrapersonal conflict between 41-51> years and <20-30 years	Accepted

CONCLUSION

This study confirmed that, intrapersonal conflict was not different from other counterparts in other Western countries based on the age differences. This research finding was significant with the previous studies. In addition, experience worker tend to be older were likely to have intrapersonal conflict. In addition, from the findings, it can

be concluded that public sector employees with age of 40-51> have more intrapersonal conflict than other cohort of age who are younger. Thus, public sector organization should pay special attention to the needs of employees at this cohort (40 and above) who are better experienced as they are expected to possess more workload and good decision making. There are two major limitations worth noting in this study, which are relating to the sample size and the industry involved. Since this study is confined to public sector employee in Putrajaya area, generalizability of the findings may be rather limited. Therefore future research may need to focus on consumers in other states, regions in order to gain more comprehensive perspective and stronger representativeness of the study in the local context.

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