



Talk on “Conflict Resolution in the Workplace”

by Ir. Chew Weng Yuen

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The Engineering Education Technical Division had co-organized a talk entitled “Conflict Resolution in the Workplace” with Engineers Australia Malaysia Chapter, and the Institution of Mechanical Engineers Malaysia Branch, on 27th July 2017, at Wisma IEM. The talk was delivered by Ir. Dr Ling Chen Hoe who is currently the Senior General Manager and Director of Meiden Malaysia.

There were 32 participants in the talk, and Ir. Dr Ling commenced by stating that workplace conflicts occur at every level in an organization. When conflict is chronic, it’s a sign of executive dysfunction. Ir. Dr Ling mentioned that ill-managed conflict may cost organizations in many ways *inter alia* loss of productivity, morale, motivation, creative thinking, decision-making, time, energy, reputation, health, personal and professional relationships. In contrast, well-managed conflict leads to results that can enhance relationships, productivity, and creativity.

Ir. Dr Ling then proceeded to briefly discuss the origins of conflict. He explained that misunderstanding and communication barriers are the main causes of conflict. These occur because people do not listen to each other, are not prepared to talk and resolve the situation, and may also be because they do not understand cultural differences and are not prepared to adjust or make allowances for them. Workplace conflicts could arise because of disagreement over facts and data, over process and methodologies, task, relationship, purpose, and values.

Ir. Dr Ling next mentioned the various views of conflict. Amongst those mentioned were the human relations and the interactionist views. The former believes that conflict is a natural and inevitable outcome in any group whilst the latter believes that conflict is not only a positive force in a group but that it is necessary in order for a group to perform effectively. Ir. Dr Ling also compared the traditional with the modern views of conflict. Amongst the differences between the traditional view and the modern view is that the former exerted that conflict is avoidable whereas the latter treated conflict as inevitable. He also, briefly went through with the participants on the negative outcomes from conflicts *inter alia* lack of teamwork, lack of respect, and potential violence. Common conflicts behaviors were also discussed. He next presented the organizational factors that contribute to political behavior. These include low trust, high performance pressures, scarcity of resources, self-serving senior managers, unclear evaluation systems, and role ambiguity amongst others. The organization structure can also contribute to political behavior in an organization.

Ir. Dr Ling then proceeded to discuss on the effect of culture in conflict resolution. A model of intercultural conflict style was shown to the participants. It depicts the types of conflict confrontation styles adopted by certain type of nationalities. These are the confrontational type, those that avoid confrontation, the emotional expressive type, and those that are emotionally unexpressive. It is important to understand intercultural differences in resolving conflict between different nationalities. Ir. Dr. Ling next explained the importance of emotional intelligence (EQ), intelligence quotient (IQ), and cultural intelligence (CQ) in conflict resolution. A cultural intelligence level diagram illustrating the characteristics associated with high and low levels of cultural intelligence was shown and discussed.

The next topic that was being discussed was the conflict resolution model. Ir. Dr Ling explained the five approaches of the model in detail. These are the Avoiding, Compromising, Accommodating, Collaborating, and the Competing approaches. The pros and cons of each of these approaches were highlighted to the participants. The key components of conflict management were also briefly mentioned next. This was followed by a discussion on managing team conflicts, the conflict process, and third party conflict resolution. The 5As model of conflict management (i.e. Assessment, Acknowledgement, Attitude, Action, and Analysis) was also illustrated. He concluded the talk by stating that conflict is inevitable and not necessarily unhealthy for an organization. It can be either constructive or destructive and the ability to navigate conflict is one of the primary traits of a leader.

Conflict can build trust in an organization but it also has the potential to damage trust. Ir. Dr Ling further stated that trust is what nourishes and sustains team effort towards a common organization goal. To stimulate trust in an organization, he says that the creation of a culture in which relationships are important while meeting organizational goals is crucial.



Ir. Dr Ling Chen Hoe discussing a topic during his talk on Conflict Resolution in the Workplace