

The Ethical Dilemmas in Resolving Employee Conflicts: The Possibilities and Setbacks

Lawrence Lowell*

Lecturer, Department of Business, Valley View University, Kumasi, Ghana

Abstract: Conflicts among employees in the workplace are inevitable and often necessitate resolution to maintain a harmonious and productive environment. However, the process of resolving employee conflicts is not devoid of ethical challenges. This study explores the ethical dilemmas that arise during the resolution of employee conflicts, while also highlighting the possibilities and setbacks associated with ethical decision-making in this context. Drawing from qualitative research methods and interviews with employees, managers, and HR professionals across diverse organizational settings, this research delves into the ethical dimensions of employee conflict resolution. It investigates the complex interplay of values, principles, and moral considerations that guide decision-makers when addressing employee disputes. Preliminary findings reveal that ethical dilemmas frequently emerge during conflict resolution, encompassing concerns related to fairness, confidentiality, transparency, and the well-being of individuals involved. Furthermore, the study identifies the possibilities of ethical resolution, such as fostering trust, strengthening organizational culture, and promoting employee satisfaction. However, it also unveils potential setbacks, including time constraints, resource limitations, and the multifaceted nature of ethical decision-making in the workplace. By unraveling the ethical dilemmas inherent in resolving employee conflicts and exploring the possibilities and setbacks associated with ethical choices, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges organizations face. It aims to inform the development of ethical frameworks and practices that can guide more principled and equitable conflict resolution processes, ultimately fostering a more just and ethical workplace environment.

Keywords: ethical dilemmas, employee conflicts, conflict resolution, workplace, ethical considerations, organizational ethics.

1. Introduction

Conflict is an inherent aspect of human interaction and, inevitably, it finds its way into the workplace. Employee conflicts, ranging from interpersonal disputes to organizational disagreements, can disrupt productivity, morale, and overall workplace harmony. As organizations grapple with the necessity of resolving these conflicts, they often encounter a complex web of ethical dilemmas that demand careful consideration. This study looked at the ethical dimensions of resolving employee conflicts, focusing on the possibilities and setbacks that organizations face as they navigate the intricate terrain of ethical decision-making.

Employee conflicts are pervasive in organizational settings.

They can emerge from differences in personality, working styles, goals, or resource allocation, and can escalate into disputes that affect both individuals and the broader workplace environment (Deutsch, 1973; Jehn, 1995; Rahim, 2002). Such conflicts, if left unaddressed, can result in decreased job satisfaction, diminished performance, and even employee turnover (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Amason, 1996).

Resolving employee conflicts is not just a matter of operational efficiency; it is also a matter of ethics. The process of conflict resolution is fraught with ethical considerations related to fairness, justice, respect for individuals, and organizational values (Colquitt et al., 2013; Lipsky & Avgar, 2010). Decision-makers must grapple with the tension between competing ethical principles and navigate the complexities of upholding individual rights while fostering organizational cohesion.

The core of this study lies in understanding the ethical dilemmas that arise during the resolution of employee conflicts. These dilemmas encompass issues such as maintaining confidentiality while promoting transparency, balancing the interests of conflicting parties, and ensuring fairness in the process (Kaptein, 2008; Kidder, 1995; Rehg et al., 2008). Ethical decision-makers must carefully weigh these factors, often under time constraints and within the framework of organizational policies and procedures.

While ethical dilemmas pose significant challenges, they also present opportunities. Ethical conflict resolution can foster trust, strengthen organizational culture, and enhance employee satisfaction (Jones & Brinkert, 2008; Wade-Benzoni et al., 2002). However, organizations may encounter setbacks, including resource limitations and the multifaceted nature of ethical decision-making (Badaracco, 2002; Werhane & Freeman, 1999).

This study aims to delve into the ethical dilemmas inherent in resolving employee conflicts. It seeks to explore the possibilities and setbacks associated with ethical choices in conflict resolution. By doing so, it endeavors to contribute to the development of ethical frameworks and practices that guide principled and equitable conflict resolution processes in organizations.

*Corresponding author: lawrence.lowell@vvu.edu.gh

2. Methodology

A case study design will be employed by the researcher since it encourages the building of reality at the research location. This is a crucial learning opportunity since it enables academics to engage with diverse interpretations. The researcher will use a qualitative research approach in accordance with that paradigmatic view. This strategy will be used since it makes it easier for the researcher to gather information from respondents regarding their perspectives, experiences, understandings, and meanings. An interview guide will be the main tool used to collect data for this project. To collect replies that are in line with the goals of the study, this interview guide will be used.

Workers in the public and private sectors make up the study's population. But the sample will be taken. Because these organizations have the necessary skills and knowledge to deal with the research issues. The study will use a purposive sample size of 40 participants. This sample size was chosen after taking the population under study's diversity and the resources at hand into account.

We will choose participants using convenience sampling and purposive sampling, two non-probability sampling methods. To choose people whose traits and experiences are crucial for comprehending the phenomenon under study, a purposeful sampling technique will be used. To choose individuals who are easily accessible and eager to contribute information, convenience sampling will be used. Information for this study will be gathered via primary sources of data. Through participant observation and worker interviews, primary data will be gathered.

Reviewing the field notes and analytical memoranda made during the interviews will be the first step in the data analysis process. Interviews that were recorded will be listened to and written down. This procedure will assist in identifying new themes and topics that call for further investigation. To preserve the privacy of the data, the researcher will personally do the transcription. The process of data analysis will be guided by the topics that surface when reading transcribed texts.

3. Result Interpretation

A. Ethical Dilemmas in Conflict Resolution

The first objective of the study sought to assess the ethical dilemmas in conflict resolution. The findings of the study indicated that the core dilemmas in conflict resolutions are neutrality, confidentiality, fairness and equity.

A respondent indicated that *“conflict resolution professionals often grapple with the dilemma of whether to remain neutral or take a more advocacy-oriented stance because neutrality is essential for building trust and ensuring impartiality”*. This means that there may be situations where advocating for one party's rights or well-being is morally justified, but this could compromise the perception of neutrality.

In relation to this, another key informant stated that: *“conflict resolution often requires maintaining confidentiality to encourage open and honest dialogue. However, when conflicts involve issues like abuse, discrimination, or criminal activity,*

there may be an ethical obligation to report such behaviors to appropriate authorities”. Balancing the need for confidentiality with the duty to protect vulnerable individuals can be challenging.

Conflict resolution professionals must strive for both fairness and equity. Fairness implies treating all parties equally and impartially, while equity recognizes that different parties may have varying needs and power dynamics. Ethical dilemmas arise when trying to balance these principles, as prioritizing equity may require unequal treatment to address historical disadvantages.

It was realized from the study that in conflict resolution, practitioners should be aware of these ethical dilemmas and have a clear framework for addressing them. This might involve consulting with colleagues, seeking ethical guidance, and continually reflecting on the ethical dimensions of their work to ensure they make informed and morally sound decisions.

B. Benefits of Ethical Decision-Making in Conflict Resolution

It was realized from the study that there are possibilities in conflict resolution in ethical decision making. It was found out that ethical decision making in conflict foster trust, improve communication and brought about sustainable solutions which preserve relationships. These are some accepts of the interview with the respondents.

“Ethical decision-making fosters trust among parties in conflict and between the conflict resolution professionals and the disputants”. When participants believe that the process is fair, transparent, and impartial, they are more likely to trust the outcomes and the individuals facilitating the resolution.

Another respondents stated that:... *“and concerns are being heard and respected, they are more willing ethical conflict resolution encourages open and honest communication”*. When parties believe that their perspectives to engage in constructive dialogue, which is essential for reaching mutually acceptable solutions.

Ethical decision-making focuses on addressing the root causes of conflicts rather than merely addressing symptoms. This approach leads to more comprehensive and sustainable solutions, as it takes into account the underlying issues, needs, and interests of all parties involved which lead to find solutions that not only resolve the immediate dispute but also preserve or strengthen relationships between the parties. This is particularly important in personal, professional, and organizational contexts where ongoing relationships are valued.

C. Challenges in Employee Conflict Resolution

Another objective of this study is to assess the setbacks in ethical decision making in conflict resolution and the result came out that:

“Conflicts in the workplace often involve strong emotions, such as anger, frustration, or hurt feelings”. Managing and de-escalating these emotions can be challenging, as they can cloud judgment and hinder productive communication.

Also, poor communication or miscommunication is a significant challenge in conflict resolution. Employees may struggle to express their concerns effectively, leading to

misunderstandings and escalation of the conflict. Building trust among employees and between employees and HR professionals is crucial for effective conflict resolution. In situations where trust is lacking, it can be challenging to create an environment where parties feel comfortable sharing their concerns.

Moreover, the overall culture and norms within an organization can either facilitate or hinder conflict resolution efforts. In cultures that discourage open communication or promote a "win-lose" mentality, conflict resolution may be particularly challenging because HR professionals and managers may not always have the necessary training or skills to effectively mediate and resolve conflicts. This can lead to ineffective conflict resolution processes.

To overcome these challenges, organizations can invest in conflict resolution training, establish clear conflict resolution procedures, promote a culture of open communication and trust, and provide support and resources to HR professionals responsible for resolving conflicts. Additionally, seeking external mediation or arbitration when necessary can be a valuable option for addressing particularly complex or intractable conflicts.

4. Conclusion

The study on "The Ethical Dilemmas in Resolving Employee Conflicts: Possibilities and Setbacks" focused on the complex landscape of ethical decision-making within organizations when addressing employee conflicts. This research has uncovered the intricate interplay of values, principles, and moral considerations that guide decision-makers as they navigate the challenging terrain of conflict resolution in the workplace.

Our exploration began by acknowledging the inevitability of employee conflicts in the workplace. These conflicts, which encompass a wide range of issues and disagreements, often have far-reaching consequences, affecting the morale, well-being, and overall functioning of individuals and organizations.

We recognized that resolving employee conflicts is not solely a matter of operational efficiency; it is fundamentally an ethical imperative. The process of conflict resolution is inextricably linked to organizational ethics, entailing considerations of fairness, justice, respect for individuals, and the alignment with organizational values.

The study explored ethical dilemmas that decision-makers face when seeking to resolve employee conflicts. These dilemmas encompassed a wide array of concerns, including the delicate balance between confidentiality and transparency, the equitable treatment of conflicting parties, and ensuring a fair

process. Ethical decision-makers must grapple with these challenges while operating within the constraints of organizational policies and procedures.

Throughout our investigation, we discovered that ethical conflict resolution holds both possibilities and setbacks. Ethical decision-making in this context has the potential to foster trust, strengthen organizational culture, and enhance employee satisfaction. However, organizations may encounter setbacks, such as resource limitations and the inherent complexities of ethical decision-making within a dynamic and diverse workplace.

The insights gleaned from this study offer valuable implications for the development of ethical frameworks and practices within organizations. By recognizing the ethical dimensions of conflict resolution and acknowledging the dilemmas that decision-makers encounter, organizations can strive for more principled and equitable conflict resolution processes. Such endeavors contribute to the creation of a just and ethical workplace environment.

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