Conflict and Peacemaking

"Is conflict good or bad for an organization or group?" can be an interesting research question for this lecture. However, you need to define conflict before analyzing this question.

The conflict we are talking about here is not inner conflict—the dilemma of a person trying to make a decision. We are talking about the difference between the actions or goals of two or more individuals—this difference, too, is defined as conflict. The question that arises then is, "Should conflict between two or more individuals be considered an argument, and should conflict between two or more neighboring countries be considered a war?" The answer to this question is "not necessarily."

Myers (2008) defines conflict as a "perceived incompatibility of actions or goals." Conflict occurs as a consequence of a disagreement when there is a threat (perceived or real) to the interests, needs, or wants of the individuals involved (Office of Quality Improvement & Office of Human Resource Development, n.d.).

If you composed a working hypothesis stating that "Conflict is necessary to the success of an organization," would this statement sufficiently explain if conflict is good or bad for an organization?

Expert's Opinion

Andrade, Plowman, and Duchon (2008), in an extensive literature review of past studies on conflict, concluded that conflict should not be thought of as bad or a failure of the organization's management. They stated that "Rather than needing reduction or elimination, conflict is the fuel that drives system growth, enables learning and adaptive behaviors, and makes innovation possible" (p. 23).

If managed correctly, conflict in groups and organizations seems to enhance and transform organizations into learning environments where new ideas are developed and implemented. However, if conflict is not managed correctly, it can result in increased hostility and poor organizational performance.

Andrade, L., Plowman, A., & Duchon, D. (2008). Getting past conflict resolution: A complexity view of conflict. *Emergence: Complexity and Organization, 10*(1), 23–38.

Myers, D. (2008). *Social psychology* (9th ed.). Boston: McGraw-Hill.

Office of Quality Improvement & Office of Human Resource Development.(n.d). About Conflict. Retrieved from http://www.ohrd.wisc.edu/onlinetraining/resolution/aboutwhatisit.htm#index