

# Managing Conflict in Hospitality Industry

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*Sumit Banerjee\**

## **Abstract**

As per the oxford dictionary conflict is a serious disagreement or lack of agreement between opinions, principles etc. conflict can be as simple as a difference of opinion or as complex as a lengthy battle over matters of significant importance. A conflict can be caused by an event or a clash of personalities. Conflict may also occur when people hold opposing views about a situation and how to handle it. Multiple cultures are often present in hospitality organizations; conflict may emerge through differences between culture and organizational norms. Value differences resulting from different generations can also create conflict. Supervisors must try to ensure that every employee respects the different beliefs of their co-workers. In doing so, they can help to reduce conflict within their hospitality organizations. Left alone, conflict may cause serious troubles that prevent your department from achieving its goals. If properly managed, however some types of conflict can be constructive. In this research first looks at the possible benefits of conflict to hospitality operations. Next, common sources of conflict, types of conflict, and possible outcomes of conflict are examined. Later sections examine strategies to manage conflict and negotiating techniques supervisors may use to resolve conflict between employees, between themselves and employees, and between themselves and their bosses.

**Keywords-** Source, Types, outcome of conflict and conflict management.

## **Introduction**

Hospitality management is a segment based on manpower and serves throughout the world. Also, Hospitality management is a human oriented sector that serves at hotel guests. Hotel businesses are places where the numbers of employees are sturdily tied with each other. It is quite natural for hotels to experience higher levels of conflict compared to other businesses. Among the reasons are the labor-relationship and interdependence among them. Hotel managers and supervisors face the challenges of keeping the delicate balance of satisfying their guests' as well as their employees' need and demand without alienating one group versus the other. Working out and resolving the likely conflicts are mostly the responsibility of the hotelier. If hoteliers could prevent possible conflicts before they occur or if they find a stark solution, they would be successful and the business will gain and the morale would improve.

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\* General Manager- Shiv Foods & Beverages, Ahmedabad –Varoda Express Way Mankav, Mahmedabad-387130, Gujarat, Email- [banerjee.sumit21@gmail.com](mailto:banerjee.sumit21@gmail.com), Mob- 8140035999

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## Literature Review

Conflict can be defined as a process based on interaction of a disaccord, and disagreement between social groups (Antonioni p.9). According to Rahim, it is disagreement and negative interaction between person and groups (1985 p 81). Different point of views, aspects, needs and expectations constitute the root of conflict ( Guruz & Gurel, 2006 p 377). It is possible to run into conflicts in every place where there are people. Surely, there will be disaccord, discrepancy and disagreement between people. Conflict will come into being as long as there are differences among interests, beliefs, values, and desires in choices of people (Karip. 200). It is impossible not to experience conflict at the businesses which cannot be run without people; especially, in businesses which embody a large number of staff. Conflict at large, bring in disagreement, fighting and dilapidating into our minds. These are only exaggerated descriptions of conflict. Hoteliers have been facing blames, criticisms, complains and customer dissatisfaction throughout a typical business day. Conflict in contemporary business life, may create a positive effect on making decision and power use (Barutcugil, 2002). However, Erdogam defines conflict as a facing to unwanted things in social structure, or as an emotional structure when forced to make a decision (1999). Stoner explained conflict as sharing scarce sources of two and more people or groups among themselves, or disagreements resulted from sharing activities and differences of person or groups on aim, statute, value, evaluation and perception (1978).in other words, conflict in an organization may be defined as events resulted from troubles of persons and groups working together, and so, halting or confusing common activities (Eren 2004). However, Thomas says that it is a process arising after an employee sensed that he/she was prevented doing work by another employee (1992). Conflict in hotel industries can be viewed as disaccord, disagreement, discrepancy, and divergence between two businesses, as well as between employees, departments of the business, employees-guests, and guests-guests. Conflict management in hotels can be defined as a process of using and implementing information, technique, skill and experiment in accordance with existing circumstances to help in solving the matter (Batman and Arpaci, 2008). Van Fleet regarded as one of the biggest mistakes of hoteliers not to pay attention to employees' complains (1993).

## Objective & Methodology

This Research is intended to provide effective ideas how to handle conflict in Hospitality industry. Hospitality supervisors and managers are working hard to manage conflict among staff, while also facing management challenges. This guide:

- Offers concrete ideas to handle conflict and take out some positive output – many of which can be implemented readily, with little or no cost to the department.
- Summarizes current research on employee conflict and outcome, offering fresh ideas on how to tackle conflict in every level.
- Includes practices to help managers, supervisors' individual employees and/or a whole work unit.

This paper is very much conceptual in nature and the analysis is based on the information gathered during the field visit & available secondary sources and literature reviews.

## Sources of Conflict

There are numerous sources of conflict within an organization. Many arise from situations or personalities unique to it. However there are sources of conflict common to most hospitality operations include:

- Limited resources
- Different goals
- Role ambiguity
- Work relationships
- Individual differences
- Organizational problems
- Communication problems

## Limited Resources

Resources are limited in every hospitality operation. No department has all of the people, time, money, equipment, and space it wants. Often a department can obtain resources only at the expense of another department. For example, if two departments within an organization need an upgraded computer system and there is only enough money in the budget for one, one department will likely postpone its upgrade. This creates the possibility of conflict. However, this type of conflict might prove beneficial. Limited resources

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for each department manager to justify the request for the system upgrade in relation to the organization's overall goals. The manager who persuades upper management that the organization's interest will be best served by upgrading the system in his or her department usually gets the resources.

Conflict over limited resources is not always easily resolved. For example, if two supervisors at a hotel apply for the same open manager's position conflict may result. Both applications are likely to view the open position as an opportunity for advancement: failure to land the job could be hard for either supervisor to handle. If the position is eventually filled by an external applicant still more conflict could result.

## **Different Goals**

Departments and individuals in the same hospitality operation can have different goals. Conflict can result about who is right and what strategies to pursue. For example, a hotel's food & Beverage director may want to minimize labor costs by scheduling fewer line cooks. However this may conflict the servers ability to bring out food to the guest in a timely and satisfactory manner.

Supervisors are often caught in the middle of this conflict. For example, if you are a supervisor in the kitchen operation described above, you will need to support both the kitchen and the servers as they attempt to do the best they can with a smaller staff while simultaneously adhering to the food and beverage director's decision. You can only follow your boss's direction and hope that an agreement about the extent to which each goal can be attained is reached.

## **Role Ambiguity**

Another source of conflict that can emerge through work relationships is role ambiguity. This occurs when actions seem to contradict each other. For example, one week an entry level employee attends a staff meeting where the head chef talks about the importance of quality; however, the topic of the next weekly meeting is cutting costs. What actions should that employee take when he is setting up the salads bar after the second meeting and notices that the lettuce is starting to get a little brown around the edges? Should the employee think about the issue of quality addressed in the first meeting and consequently not use the lettuce? Or, alternatively should he allow the lettuce to be used in light of the cost concerns discussed in the second meeting? These two requirements appear to be in conflict with each other. Determining how to meet both quality and cost objectives require creativity, patience and the ability to clearly and consistently communicate the requirements to the employees.

Another stress producing variable related to role ambiguity is decision latitude. Decision latitude refers to the flexibility you have in determining a course of action when attempting to resolve difficult issues and situations. Low decision latitude means you are narrowly bound to a limited number of potential solutions. This limitation can increase stress and minimize the effectiveness of employees. In contrast, empowering well trained and well-coached employees with high decision latitude is often a more effective approach.

## **Work Relationships**

The success of a hospitality operation depends on close cooperation from members of all departments. Often, employees cannot do some or any of their work until others have completed theirs. For example, if front desk agents are to sell rooms to walk in guests, they need up to the minute room status information from housekeeping. Housekeeping room attendants depend on laundry to provide clean linens. Also, servers or bus persons cannot set tables until clean table cloths and napkins are available. Conflict can result when, for whatever reason, an employee, supervisor, or manager;

- Fails to complete an assigned task
- Completes a task late
- Fails to cooperate with staff members from other departments

The most important factor in resolving conflict is trust among the individuals involved. Believing that your co workers are competent and want to work together are important ingredients to moving forward in accomplishing the job to be done.

## **Individual Differences**

Differences among employees, supervisors and managers due to personal attitudes and opinions, educational and cultural backgrounds, experience, age or work related duties and responsibilities can cause conflict. A diverse staff does not mean that employees will always be in conflict: however it does mean that supervisors have an even greater responsibility to ensure that conflict

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does not become disruptive or counter productive.

## **Organizational Problems**

Organizational problems can be source of conflict. This occurs, for example when one department believes its efforts are more important than those of other departments. Other potential sources of organizational conflict include change, overlapping job responsibilities, vague job descriptions, and other situations that cloud or obscure basic functions. Employees, supervisors and managers can experience conflicts that create stress if their duties and responsibilities are not clearly defined. When the extent of a supervisor's authority is not clear, for example, conflicts can arise within the supervisor, between the supervisor and employees, and between the supervisor and his or her boss.

## **Communication problems**

Communication problems are at the root of many conflicts. Effective communication about the organization's resources, goals, roles, work relationships, individual differences, and organizational problems can go a long way toward increasing cooperation within the organization and avoiding conflict that blocks goal achievement.

## **Types of Conflict**

While conflict can take many forms, the types of conflict supervisors are most often called on to manage are personal are personal conflicts that occur within their department or work area. Anyone within an organization can experience mixed feelings about some of the organizations policies about certain individuals about job tasks and procedures and about gaps between personal and organizational goals. Employees may deal with personal conflict by becoming quietly frustrated or physically expressing their concerns- slamming a door for example. They may also withdraw from the conflict by daydreaming or pretending they are not angry or upset. These reactions can affect work performance. Other symptoms of unresolved conflict among employees include-

- Withdrawn employees who don't talk to each other or to you
- Inappropriate behavior such as name-calling or talking loudly
- Low group and/or individual morale
- Decreased productivity levels
- Distrust between groups and individuals
- Choosing sides.i.e its us against them
- Recurring operational problems that everyone seems to ignore

Conflict can also occur within a supervisor. For example a new supervisor may feel internal conflict, especially if he or she has just been promoted from the ranks of the employees whom he or she must now supervise. The promotion places the supervisor in a new leadership role and with this role comes the need to enforce the property's policies and procedures. As the new supervisor manages employees who were formerly peers, an internal conflict about where friendships end and professional relationships begin is bound to arise. The success of a new supervisor may depend, at least in part, on how well he or she handles this unavoidable internal conflict.

Conflict also occurs between individuals at any organizational level. When two or more employees disagree over a situation, event or personality problem their supervisor may have to serve as a mediator- an objective third party- to help the employees resolve their conflict.

Because the supervisor serves as a linking pin between higher and lower levels within the organization, conflict can occur between supervisors and employees. For example, supervisors will need to enforce unpopular rules and policies and may have to implement changes that the employees do not like. Conflict can also occur between a supervisor and his or her boss as the supervisor attempts to represent the best interests of his or her employees to upper management.

## **Outcomes of Conflict-**

To effectively manage conflict, a supervisor should analyze each situation in terms of its possible outcomes. It is also important for a supervisor to understand how his or her management style can affect those outcomes and to be able to develop an appropriate strategy to reduce or resolve the conflict. Outcomes of resolving personal conflict can be described as lose-lose, win-lose, or win-win.

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In a lose-lose outcome, no one involved in the conflict has all or even most of his or her needs satisfied. Typically the basic reasons for the conflict remain and conflict may recur over the same issues until they are resolved.

In a win-lose outcome, one party's needs or concerns are satisfied while those of the other party or parties are not. Since this type of outcome typically fails to resolve all of the problems that created the conflict, future conflict may arise over the same or similar problems. Therefore while a win-lose outcome may reduce the conflict temporarily for the winning party; it may not resolve the conflict. In addition win lose outcomes often cause resentment in the minds of the losers.

In a win-win outcome, the needs of all parties are satisfied in some way and the conflict is resolved. To reach this outcome, those in conflict must understand each other's needs, confront the issues and work together to objectively resolve the situation so everyone benefits. Only with a win-win outcome is a conflict truly resolved for the long term.

As a supervisor you can determine which outcome is best for each conflict and try to steer the parties toward the outcome. For example, if your goal is to temporarily reduce conflict, you may adopt a short term strategy appropriate to a win-lose or lose-lose outcome. If your goal is to fully resolve the conflict, you must be prepared to spend the time and effort required to create a win-win outcome.

## **Conflict Management Strategies-**

Many supervisors make the mistake of using the same strategy to manage all workplace conflicts. This is not a useful approach because the strategy used to address a conflict may itself determine the kind of outcome it produces. Therefore, supervisors who consistently manage conflict with the same approach often find themselves facing the same type of outcome- lose-lose, win-lose or win-win- no matter what the conflict is or what outcome may be the most appropriate.

Conflict management strategies vary in relation to the supervisor's levels of assertiveness and cooperation. Five typical styles of managing conflict are;

- Avoidance
- Accommodation
- Competition
- Mutual problem solving
- Compromise

The following sections examine each strategy and identify the conflict outcome that each style typically produces

### **Avoidance-**

A supervisor with low levels of assertiveness and cooperation probably wants to avoid conflict. Avoidance behaviors include withdrawing from conflict situations, remaining neutral sidestepping the real issues or constantly postponing a confrontation. Instead of seeing the benefits of conflict, this type of supervisor focuses only on the negative aspects. However supervisors who ignore problems in the hope that they will go away often find that the problems become worse and the intensity of the conflict increases. The avoidance style of managing conflict encourages lose-lose outcomes in which the needs of all parties in conflict go unaddressed.

### **Accommodation-**

A supervisor with a low level of assertiveness and a high level of cooperation will likely want to accommodate the needs of others, even if it means neglecting his or her own needs. Supervisors who sacrifice their interests inevitably end up on the losing side of win-lose outcomes. Accommodating supervisors often display avoidance behaviors. The difference as a conflict management style is that while both parties lose when conflict is avoided, when one party accommodates the other party wins by default; thus, the accommodating party loses by choice.

### **Competition-**

A supervisor with a high level of assertiveness and a low level of cooperation will likely be competitive in conflict situations. A supervisor who uses competition often attempts to dominate others by using power or authority to ensure that his or her needs are satisfied. Obviously, competitive approaches to conflict usually force win-lose outcomes, with the supervisor determining the winner and the loser.. When your employees lose all the time, resentment may build and job performance may suffer.

### **Mutual problem-solving**

A supervisor with high levels of assertiveness and cooperation will usually resolve conflict by collaborating with others to reach

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mutually agreed-upon solutions. With the mutual problem solving approach to conflict, both parties acknowledge that conflict exists and are willing to take the time to determine and understand each other's underlying needs and objectives. Both parties search for commonalities and don't dwell on their differences. Potential solutions to the conflict are developed together and the solution selected is the one that best meets both of their needs. Honesty and hard negotiating generally lead to creative solutions that can meet the needs of everyone concerned. This approach encourages win-win outcomes.

## Compromise

A supervisor with moderate levels of both assertiveness and cooperation will likely respond to conflict by seeking a compromise. Generally a compromise allows each party to partially satisfy some needs and concerns. Depending on how the parties in conflict view the partial solution, a compromise could create a number of different outcomes:

- Lose-lose outcome-if neither party is satisfied with the partial solution
- Win-lose outcome- if one party feels it has won (or lost) at the other's expense.
- Win-win Outcome-if, over time, the parties in conflict learn to accept the partial solution.

Regardless of your management style, there will be times when compromise is the most effective outcome.

## Mediating Conflict between Employees:

Conflict between employees occurs more often than most supervisors would like. While dealing with personalities and emotions can be difficult, it has to be done. Dealing with employee conflict is one of a supervisor's most important contributions to the efficiency of his or her department. Once you have decided on the site and have chosen a time for the meeting, there are several things you should do before, during, and after your meeting with the employees who are in conflict. The most important thing to avoid before the meeting is jumping to conclusions. Despite what you may feel about the participants or the conflict, you must try to keep an open mind. For some conflicts, you may want to get a version of the situation from third parties. Ask other department employees who have remained neutral for their perspective on the conflict and how it is affecting their work. If the conflict is serious, be ready to hear negative, unpleasant, critical and even confused feedback from your employees. They may be emotional, and there are likely to be different versions of the events or situations that led to the conflict.

A meeting to discuss a conflict can become disorderly and lead almost anywhere if you let it. Tips for maintaining control during this kind of meeting include:

- Do not take phone calls during the meeting
- Prevent interruptions unless they are absolutely necessary
- Keep focused during the meeting. Don't keep looking at your watch, at papers, or at the computer screen.
- Maintain eye contact
- Avoid taking notes, especially if employees don't know why you are taking them
- Investigate the issue thoroughly

Additionally, the following six steps can help you keep the discussion organized and under control:

1. Set the tone
2. Get the feelings
3. Get the facts
4. Ask for help
5. Get a commitment
6. Follow up

**Set the Tone:** First, greet the employees cordially and try to establish an open and non-threatening tone for the meeting. This can be done by the words you choose and the way you say them as you open the floor for discussion. You can begin by saying something like: "over the last few days I have noticed that there seems to be a problem with you two and I think it is affecting your work. Is there anything that you want to talk about? This or a similar approach is better than a more abrupt statement such as "you guys have got a problem and we are going to get to the bottom of it right now. Such statements put employees on guard and make it difficult to facilitate a productive meeting.

**Get the Feeling.** After setting the tone, focus on discovering the employees' feelings. Your objective in emotional conflict situations is to give the employees opportunities to release their emotions and clear the way for effective solutions. Often what you will

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get from the employees at first is a rush of words as they release emotions that have been held in check, perhaps for a long time. Don't interrupt or seek clarification at this time, it's very important to allow the employees to express their frustrations. By allowing the employees to "talk out" their feelings you are helping to defuse the conflict and enabling them to gain control of their emotions. Once the person has talked it out, you should summarize the feelings expressed and re-state them for clarification.

**Get the facts-** Once employees have talked their feelings through, you can move on to investigating the facts. Listen patiently to what the employees have to say, even if you think their input may be inaccurate or irrelevant. You can keep employees talking without agreeing with them by nodding or occasionally saying "I see" or "yes". Listen for the feelings the employees are expressing as well as the content of their message.

If the fact finding discussion gets dogged down in an argument, there are several strategies you can use to move the discussion to a more productive level:

- Try to depersonalize the conflict. Talk about it as if it could have happened to anyone in order to reduce tension.
- Ask the employees to put aside their feelings for the moment and pretend they are third parties trying to discover the factors that contributed to the conflict.
- Ask each employee to think about how the other employee may have seen the situation that led to the conflict. This may reveal information gaps or incorrect assumptions about where the other employee was coming from. Often personal conflicts are partly or entirely based on these misunderstanding.

**Ask for Help-** at this point many supervisors tell employees what they should do to solve the conflict. It's better however, to encourage them to work out their own solution. Employees must manage their conflicts, and they must work harder than you to resolve them. Ask open-ended questions that invite the employees to identify causes and offer solutions. Don't accept solutions such as "we will try harder to get along" ask additional questions to help the employees specify what they will actually do to try harder. Help the employees be as specific as possible about the future actions they will take to resolve the conflict. Remember, it is the employees' responsibility to resolve the conflict. Your job is to facilitate the discussion, adding your own suggestion as appropriate and securing commitment from both parties.

**Get a Commitment-** after you have agreed on what to do, ask the employees to commit themselves to performing their part of the solution. You may want to help the employees put their plan in writing. The plan should indicate what is to be done, who will do what, how it's to be done, when it will be done, and with what help. If it's a serious conflict, it may be useful to have the employees sign the plan they have created.

**Follow Up-** Schedule a follow up meeting to check whether the employees' solution is being implemented and is working. Let the employees know that they must follow through with what they have agreed to do. Tell employees that if their plan does not work you have your own plan ready. Let the employees know about your plan and under what conditions you will implement it. After the meeting, take some time- immediately afterward, if possible- to analyze what happened by asking yourself questions such as:

- What did I do that worked?
- What did I do that did not work?
- What strategy or tactic was most successful?
- What concessions did each employee make and when?
- Did I make any concessions and when?
- What happened as a result of these concessions?
- What information came from the meeting that will be of long term benefit?
- What would I do differently next time?

## **Conclusion-**

There is conflict within all hospitality operations. A traditional management view holds that it should be avoided because it disrupts an organization and prevents optimal performance; however a more accurate view is that conflict is not necessarily good or bad, but it is inevitable. Supervisors must be ready to manage the range of workplace conflicts in a manner that does not alienate employees or guests. Subtle conflict may force a group to focus on its goals, but it must be carefully managed and resolved. A key tactic in successful conflict management is awareness of the feelings of everyone involved in the conflict. At some point in resolving the conflict, these feelings must be understood and addressed. Some conflict is necessary for good work performance. When there is a low level of conflict and performance levels are low, the organization stagnates, it does not improve. On the other hand when there are high levels of

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conflict and performance, chaos is a potential result. There is an optimal relationship between conflict and performance. Unfortunately there is no standard set of rules about how to manage conflict to achieve optimal results. Supervisors must foster honest and objective opposition that will help the department while preventing the kind of conflict that leads to disorganization and unmotivated employees. You will be better able to carry out this task if you understand sources of conflict within hospitality operations. In many ways your success will be determined by how you assess different perspective, acknowledge them, and respond to them.

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