Butter Me Up: A Case Study in Conflict Resolution

Introduction, Literature Review, Case Study, and Supporting Materials

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Abstract

Butter Me Up: A Case Study in Conflict Resolution discusses the implications that

conflict has on tearing organizations apart. Without proper training and education,

managers could be enabling a small conflict to arise and become detrimental to the

organization. Organizational conflict, the defensive climate conflict creates within an

organization due to conflict, role ambiguity, and how these problems affect the entire

organization are all examined and applied to an organizational case study, intended for

use in a training and development program.

Conflict Resolution

Case studies are an interesting way to learn about possible situations and scenarios. By using these, individuals can learn to study and prevent organizational problems from occurring. Case studies can be taken into the classroom or into any organization. Used effectively, case studies can train and teach employees, develop better managers and leaders, and stop conflict before it even occurs. This paper seeks to better understand how emotions play into the workforce, and the different ways of intervention revolving around the resolution of any type of conflict. This paper will first look at a rationale for the case study method as effective pedagogy in particular contexts, and for particular subject matter, such as classrooms and organizations. I will also seek to build a case for the advantages of using case studies in the provided context. Theory and relevant literature dealing with conflict management and related concepts will be reviewed for a more thorough understanding of conflict resolution. I will provide a case study outline, my specific case study concentrating on conflict resolution, and then provide supporting materials to supplement the case study.

Case Studies

Case methods have been employed at least since the 1920's to encourage reflection, integration of theory and practice, and problem solving (Shockley-Zalabak, 2004, p.1). What exactly is a case study? Case studies are "examples or illustrations of organizational problems or challenges. A case gives information about the organization, its people, and its performance" (Dana, 2001, p. 5). The primary purpose of the case study method is to develop our abilities. The case focuses on social actors in an organizational context to examine the role of communication. The case study method is

based on a systematic search of the case for the complex processes, events, or factors that have contributed to the presented problems, issues, or circumstances. Analysis aims to provide theory-based explanations of events as opposed to anecdotal or conventional wisdom explanations. Prescriptions are recommended courses of action based on an examination of options and theory-based reasoning for recommended decisions (Dana, 2001.

The case study offers many important benefits. For pedagogical purposes, case studies can be used effectively to pool experiences of a group of students, promote synthesis of separate concepts and principles into one structured explanation or plan of action, and promotes problem solving based learning. Other advantages include personal involvement, group cooperation, reference to a known situation, recognition of different personal viewpoints, realization that there are multiple solutions to problems, improved interpersonal skills, improved communication skills, and attitude change. One of the most important and pertinent benefits of the case study method is the encouragement of critical thinking (Stolovitch & Keeps, 1991).

Case studies have five main objectives, to have employees ask questions that extract key information, diagnose actual cases, define all the different issues involved in the case, make decisions, and formulate principles for handling future situations (Stolovitch & Keeps, 1991, p. 46). "The case study method offers opportunities for technical personnel, professional practitioners, managers, and learners of all sorts to acquire higher-level problem-solving and decision-making skills. By dealing with situations that actually existed in the past that simulate potential occurrences, analytic,

diagnostic, and prescriptive competencies are practiced and honed" (Stolovitch & Keeps, 1991, p. 46).

The case study method is essential in the situation of conflict resolution. One of the most important ways to prevent conflict is to train employees and management on how to effectively identify conflict and successfully resolve it. Using different case studies and examining a variety of scenarios with realistic settings and problems helps employees and management see that conflict is everywhere and the key to resolving it is being educated on the many forms conflict subsumes. Repetition is one of the most effective ways to learn new skills. By providing numerous examples of organizational conflict scenarios and constantly learning how to deal with them, employees and managers can feel that they have a good grasp on organizational problems should they arise (Dana, 2001).

<div align="center">Literature Review</div>

Looking at previous literature on concepts related to conflict resolution furthers one's understanding of different contexts conflict can occur in and the different methodological approaches employees and managers can take to reduce conflict. Concepts that I found to be relevant to the issue of interpersonal conflict in the workplace include conflict resolution, organizational culture, organizational climate, and equity theory.

Conflict Resolution

Conflict has a way of tearing organizations apart. Without proper training and education, managers could be enabling a small conflict to arise and become detrimental to the organization. Daniel Dana (2001) seeks to answer the questions what is workplace

conflict? Workplace conflict is "a condition between or among workers whose jobs are interdependent, who feel angry, who perceive the other(s) as being at fault, and who act in ways that cause a business problem" (Dana, 2001, p. 5) Case studies are utilized to determine whether the situation at hand is a conflict or a disagreement. Six characteristics that distinguish a conflict from a disagreement: interdependency, number of interested parties, constituent representation, negotiator authority, critical urgency, and communication channels. The degree of these six characteristics vary according to the situation at hand.

Training is a key element in preventing and resolving conflict. John Davidson and Christine Wood (2004) looked at the effects of training in an institutional setting by utilizing the Conflict Resolution Model. The focus of the article was on the development of individual orientations to a win-win approach to conflict resolution and the result of training in relevant skills that are thought to optimize the outcomes for the persons involved. Even short periods of training in the Conflict Resolution Model have been found to produce significantly better mutual outcomes in conflict resolution test interactions. The initial benefit is probably due to the change of orientation towards achieving a win-win solution, having an effective strategy to achieve this goal, and the increased motivation this brings. Substantial periods of training and practice, such as those typical of PET programs, produce longer-term changes in the acquisition and utilization of skills appropriate to conflict resolution. Also, gains in achieving better mutual outcomes are not dependent on both participants being trained; they also occur in interactions between a trained and an untrained participant. Training of both participants, however, produces better and more consistent results.

Conflict costs organizations money. Managers learn to calculate the cost of conflict. They learn to calculate the cost of conflict through wasted time, reduced decision quality, loss of skilled employees, restructuring, sabotage, theft, damage, lowered job motivation, tardiness, lost work time, and health costs. By recognizing how much unresolved conflict can cost an organization, managers will learn to prevent conflict at all costs and if it is unpreventable, they will know the proper steps needed to resolve the conflict (Dana, 2001).

There are four different mediation styles an organization can undergo if conflict is unavoidable. Managerial mediation is a diagnostic tool for use by managers, supervisors, team leaders, and others that involves a simple form of third-party mediation to resolve conflict between two employees for whose performance the manager is responsible. Douglas Noll (2001) developed a theory that provides a descriptive prediction of what orientations, processes, and outcomes might be expected in a given conflict or dispute. The theory of mediation is as follows, "The nature of the conflict dictates the mediation process to be used and the conflict's likely outcome" (Noll, 2001, p. 83). By reviewing literature having to do with conflict goals, level of conflict escalation, mediation styles or processes, and outcomes, Noll had a better idea of how to make his theory encompass all of these aspects.

Self-mediation is a diagnostic tool for use by individuals who are personally involved with conflict with another person whom they have an ongoing interdependent relationship with. Team mediation is a diagnostic tool for use by team leaders for resolving disputes among members that involves the leader acting as a low-power, neutral third party. Preventative mediation is a diagnostic tool for use by members and

leaders of working groups that applies two guiding principles drawn from the practice of mediation and enables non-adversarial management of differences in all important relationships (Dana, 2001).

The essence of this book lies in an organizations ability to train employees and management on these four mediation roles and to provide a mediating organization, one in which interest reconciliation is the prevailing approach to resolving conflicts. In order to provide a mediating organization to resolve conflicts, managers need to establish a strong organizational culture.

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture is central to any business. It consists of the rights, values, rituals, and norms for an organization. Organizational culture is usually pretty and does not vary much. A study by Matthew Hayward and Warren Boeker (1998) looked at the resolution of conflicts of interest that arise when actors in professional firms represent separate parties with competing interests. They found that the investment firms with high reputations have stronger cultures than investment firms with poor reputations. The investment firms with the high reputations had an easier time resolving conflict than the investment firms with poor reputations.

Another influence on organizational culture is organizational metaphors. Metaphors contribute to organizational analysis in three primary ways: creating and developing organizational theory, describing and understanding the discursive texture of organizations, and conducting organizational research. Using metaphors in an organization is an easy way to take a concept or organizational value and compare it to something everyone knows about. This causes the members of an organization an easy

way to remember the concept, value or culture, and truly understand the context of the situation.

A study was conducted to assess the extent to which metaphors are utilized to describe interpersonal conflicts reported in written journals and to determine the type and tonal qualities of the metaphors employed to describe interpersonal problems. Results indicated that metaphors were not normally used unless they were natural world and physical and mental status type metaphors. The suggestive meanings of those metaphors used most frequently involved troubled feelings and powerless feelings (Shockley-Zalaback, 2002).

Organizational Climate

Another helpful factor in reducing conflict would be for an organization to provide a supportive organizational climate. Organizational climate goes hand in hand with organizational culture. An organization's culture is dependent upon an organization's climate. This is a relatively enduring quality of the internal environment of an organization that is perceived and experienced by its members, influences their behavior, and can be described in terms of the values of a particular set of characteristics of the organization. Organizations with supportive climates include description, problem orientation, spontaneity, equality, empathy, and provisionalism. Organizations with defensive climates include evaluation, control, strategy, neutrality, superiority, and certainty (Gibb, 1961).

Mark Johlke and Christina Stamper (2003) studied the impact of perceived organizational support on the relationship between boundary spanner role stress and work outcomes. 400 questionnaires were distributed to managers from five top sales firms

measuring perceived organizational support, role conflict, role ambiguity, job satisfaction, intent to remain, and task performance. Sample questions for perceived organizational support included "This firm cares about my opinions" and "This firm really cares about my well-being." Items measuring role conflict include "I sometimes have to ignore rules to complete assignments." Items measuring role ambiguity include "I know what all my responsibilities are." Job satisfaction was measured with items such as "I feel that my job is interesting." Intent to remain with the organization was measured using such items as "I would be willing to change companies if the new job offered more status." Concepts such as quality of assigned territory, product lines, customers, and economic conditions were looked at in order to measure task performance. They found that organizations with supportive climates will have less chance of role conflict, ambiguity, higher job satisfaction, increased task performance and increases the intent to stay (Johlke & Stamper, 2003, p. 575).

Randi Sims (2000) explores the relationship between conflicting ethical expectations for lying behavior and employee attitudes. In a sample of 140 full-time employees, the findings indicated that as the difference between formal codes of ethics and supervisor expectations for lying behavior increases, intentions of turnover and expressed feelings of intrapersonal role conflict increase, and job and organizational satisfaction and affective commitment decrease. This study reiterated the fact that organizations who have a strong organizational climate will have a stronger sense of cohesion. The member will have higher satisfaction, be committed to their jobs, have lower turnover rates, and have less ambiguous intrapersonal role conflicts.

The harmonious or conflictive atmosphere (whichever is established) within institutions is not limited to interpersonal encounters or interactions but also involves relations among sections, departments, and other administrative groups. Each section, department, and administrative group depends on one another to establish the organizational climate and resolve conflict when necessary. No one area of the institution can resolve conflict without the other. Employees work within groups in an organization. Although each section, department, and administrative group depends on one another to establish the organizational climate and resolve conflict when necessary, employees put forth the effort because of rewards they get back from the organization.

Equity Theory

Individuals in the organizations consider what they contribute to the organization with respect to the rewards they get from the organization. Employees then compare these input-output ratios with the perceived input-output ratios of others. If subordinates feel they get as much from the organization as they put in, they tend to be more satisfied and have higher levels of liking for their superiors (Eisenberg & Goodall, 2004).

. Johnson, Ford, and Kaufman (2000), developed predictions about how two forms of power affect subordinates' anticipated emotional reactions to an inappropriate act by a supervisor and the likelihood that they will express these emotions toward their supervisor. The effects of dependence and legitimacy on the anticipated experience of three backward-looking emotions (satisfaction, anger, and resentment) and two forward-looking emotions (excitement and worry). Subordinates report the highest levels of anger and resentment when they are in the least dependent position and the lowest levels when they are in a highly and equally dependent relationship with their superior. Less

dependent subordinates feel more excitement when their superior is not endorsed. Finally, subordinates in a highly dependent position or with a highly endorsed supervisor are less likely to report the likelihood of expressing negative emotions toward their superior.

Perhaps no other feature of organizational life is more pervasive than conflict. Disputing parties struggle over issues as varied as cubicle size, work assignments, difficult coworkers, desirable territories, and performance reviews. Struggles such as these typically generate substantial emotion, which may range from excitement to anger to resentment, and bear the form of smiles, swearing, sarcasm, crying, or overt and thinly veiled insults (Dana, 2001).

Emotions may vary considerably in intensity as well as duration. When strongly felt, emotions may motivate individuals to take action to maintain or change current structural relationships or to redress conflict. Individuals, however, may mask or hide certain emotions because of the perceived risk associated with revealing them. These emotional experiences and emotional responses by workers often influence the everyday events and activities in organizations, including worker productivity and cooperation.

By understanding the past literature, we can see the importance of anticipating, assessing, and preventing conflict. Conflict costs organizations a lot of time, energy, money, and deteriates the overall climate and morale of the organization. Case studies provide an understanding of conflict for students to take from the classroom into the "real world." They provide organizational members with practical examples of how to reduce conflict. Utilizing case studies is another method of reinforcing the importance of training employees and managers to effectively deal with conflict in order to preserve the

harmony of the organization. Equity Theory can be applied to a variety of situations and

has practical implications for any type of organization whether it is a business or an

institution. An employee only puts into the organization what they get out of it.

Managers can utilize this information to find ways to give employees incentives to put

forth the extra effort and make the organization stand out amongst all others. Conflict

takes many forms and can differ across time and contexts. It is important for

organizations to be educated and utilize the proper mediation strategies in order to most

effectively resolve conflict and ensure the future success within and of the organization.

The following case study presents an organizational conflict dealing with the issue of job

promotions. The case study takes place over a two month period of time. There is a

short section that goes back in time to set the context for the organizational relationships.

There are many key characters to keep in mind while reading the case study.

Kate has worked for Etcetera for the past year promised the position of front-end

supervisor before she leaves for London for a month in the summer. She is liked and

respected by employees and managers at Etcetera. Kerri is the manager at Etcetera who

makes the final promotion decisions. Mallory is a new employee at Etcetera; she is rude

and unfriendly to Etcetera employees but has a personal relationship with Kerri. Tina has

been with Etcetera for six years, makes recommendations for front-end supervisors, and

is Kate's immediate supervisor. Allie is Kate's best friend at Etcetera and is one of the

few employees not fired with management changes. Bill is a manager at Etcetera but

ends up quitting the company because of inconsistencies with the district manager.

Upon reading and analyzing this case study, employees and students will learn

various conflict resolution mediation strategies to apply not only to this specific case

study but to the plethora of conflicts that exist within organizations. Following the case

study are supporting materials including a case study outline (Appendix A), overview,

learning objectives, character descriptions, key concepts, discussion questions, a teaching

activity, and a debriefing focus (Appendix B).

"Butter Me Up"

One Month Ago

"Oh my gosh Kate, do I have stories to tell you. This has been the craziest month this store has ever seen. You are absolutely going to die" Allie, the bedding associate at Etcetera exclaimed to Kate. One month ago, Kate left Etcetera to study abroad in London. Days before her departure she had a conversation with Kerri, the store manager on her last night of work. "Kate, your performance here has been phenomenal over the past year, I know that you're studying in London for a month, but when you get back, I think we have some things to talk about. The position of front end supervisor is opening up since Stephanie is graduating." With that, Kerri winked and walked away and a huge smile spread across Kate's face. She thought to herself, "They're going to make me front end supervisor when I get back!"

Currently

Kate had been with Etcetera since August. As a human resources major at Hines University, she needed to find a job that put her in contact with a lot of different individuals. She wanted to find something that would help her deal with different types of employees, managers, and customers. Retail was the perfect place for all of this to occur. She applied to Etcetera because it was one of her favorite stores. She went through two different interview processes with Bill and Kerri, the store managers. They both loved her and Kate was immediately hired as a cashier at the customer service desk. Kate's immediate supervisor was Tina. Tina and Kate got along very well in part because Kate was always willing to pick up the hours Tina needed to fill. This entailed many nights and weekends but Kate never minded. She wanted the experience and needed the money.

Over the past year, Tina began giving Kate more responsibility such as counting down all six cash drawers instead of just her one drawer. She was finally given permission to be in charge of all the front-end damages and fill out the appropriate paperwork in the stockroom and she even began training new cashiers. In a few short months, Kate had outgrown bathroom and bag filling duties and began to move closer to the supervisor position. She was nervous to study in London the first month in June because she didn't want her progress at Etcetera to go down the drain because of her extended absence. She decided the only way to make sure her job was safe and secure was to have a meeting with Tina, her immediate supervisor, and Bill, one of the store managers who was usually working during her shifts.

"Bill, a month is a long time to be gone from the store" Kate said. "I'm nervous that I'm going to regress from all the progress I've made this year in my absence." Bill quickly reassured her, "retail is a business with high turnover, but when we find quality employees, we treat them right and make accommodations for them. You are one of our prized employees and you have nothing to worry about while you're gone." Kate immediately felt better. Bill was not the type of person to be so complimentary, she thought to herself. He's usually pretty aloof and quiet. In the past year, Bill had given her only a handful of compliments so she knew that for him to make such a fuss over her, he had to be serious. Kate then made her way to Tina to gain more reassurance for her position.

"Tina, I'm nervous that somebody is going to take over all my shifts while I'm gone and when I return, I won't get my old hours back. I really like these hours and my responsibilities and I don't want things to change." Tina gave a hearty laugh and replied,

"Obviously we have to hire somebody to cover your hours while you're gone but rest assured that when you return, you can have them back. It is not easy to gain the amount of responsibility you have in the short amount of time that you've gained it in. On that note, you have nothing to worry about. It's only a month and I highly doubt that much can change in that amount of time." Kate immediately felt satisfied with her responses and left for Europe without so much as a second thought.

Present Day

Kate returned from London and immediately went into Etcetera to check her work schedule. As she ran down the list, Kate realized that she did not recognize many of the names in any of the departments. Most of her friends were no longer working for the company anymore. The only ones left were Jenny, one of the front-end supervisors, Allie, who worked in bedding, and Jordan who worked in the bath department. Allie was working the day Kate came in and immediately ran up to her and gave her a huge hug.

"Wow do I have to fill you in on everything you've missed out on. First, Bill just up and quit out of nowhere. I guess the district manager was doing things over Bill's head and sent three of our department managers to the Merriville store and only provided Bill a week's notice to find replacements. Our store has become the management-training store so we get department managers for a few months and then they move on to their permanent store and the process starts all over again. Bill had been lied to for months and the district manager was making large organizational decisions behind his back, questioning his authority in front of his employees, and not recognizing the achievement Bill had been making. I guess he got so stressed out that he couldn't take it anymore and just left without even putting in his two weeks notice. There's also a new

bedding manager named Erica and she is so compulsive. Oh, by the way, did I tell you

that I got promoted to being full time bridal consultant? I finally got out of bedding!

Erica went back there and fired Melissa and Lindsey within two weeks because their

closes were a mess. We only ended up getting a 64% on our secret shop so this place is

being run more like a military than the fun store it once was. We have walkie talkies now

so employees can't leave their departments without it being covered by a manager,

supervisor, or other employee."

As Allie went on with her stories, Kate began to realize just how much things had

changed since she had left. With the new management and assignment of positions, Kate

wondered how all of this was going to impact her. She continued to listen to Allie talk

about who got fired, who got hired, and who switched departments. Luckily, a bridal

couple came in and Allie had to go. Kate was ready to leave the store for the day. She

had to work tomorrow and knew she was in for some unanticipated surprises.

The Next Morning

Kate walked into work the next morning. She was working the customer service

desk with Mallory, the new cashier Kerri had hired. Mallory was Kerri's best friend's

daughter. Kerri informed Kate that she would be training Mallory for the next two

weeks. Kate always enjoyed training the new employees so it was a great welcome back

task for her. Kate immediately went downstairs to the customer service desk to teach

Mallory how to count her cash drawer. Kate approached the desk and saw a tall brunette

girl about her age with a huge scowl on her face. "Are you Kate" the girl asked? Kate

gave a friendly smile, "Hi, you must be Mallory, are you ready for a fun-filled day of

training?" Kate asked sarcastically. Mallory rolled her eyes and quickly retorted "Can we

just get started please?" Kate was taken aback by Mallory's aggressiveness but brushed it

off and began showing her how to count her drawer and gave her a quick tour of the

different departments so Mallory could answer customer's questions, phone calls, and

meet the other employees she would be communicating with. The entire morning went

by and Mallory barely spoke to Kate, the other employees, or even the customers. No

matter how hard she tried, Kate could not get Mallory to warm up. Mallory got to leave

at lunch so Kate had the rest of the afternoon to herself to work with Allie. After her

lunch break Kate came downstairs, relieved to have rid herself of Mallory, and began

talking to Allie. "I don't know what is wrong with her; I could not get her to smile at all

today." Allie laughed and said "she was just as bad when she came in for the application;

she acted like she was doing me a favor by talking to me." Allie and Kate laughed it off

and continued working the rest of the day.

The next few weeks went by the same as the first day. Kate spent her time

showing Mallory how things ran and Mallory spent her time rolling her eyes at Kate and

acting annoyed all the time. Finally the day came when Kate no longer had to train

Mallory. Back to school was fast approaching and this was the busiest time of the year

for Etcetera. Kate was beginning to wonder when Kerri was going to approach her about

her promotion to front end supervisor. Kate had been back for a month and had proved

herself to be a competent and respectful employee. Another week went by with still no

word about the position from Kerri. Kate decided that she would have a meeting with

Kerri on Friday to discuss her future with the company.

Friday Night Shift

Kate got to work early on Friday evening and went straight to Kerri's office. Kerri was filling out paperwork so Kate knocked on the door and sat in the chair in front of Kerri's desk. Kerri looked up and said "What can I do for you Kate?" Kate took a deep breath and began talking. "We had talked before I left about having a about my performance with the company and the front end supervisor position that opened up when Stephanie graduated. I had the inclination that I was being considered for that and I was wondering what the status of the position is now." Kerri smiled at Kate. "Kate, you are a wonderful employee, someone I can always count on, and someone who always does a good job. There are still some things I need to sort through before I can say anything to you officially but take it from me, the position is as good as yours." Kate immediately felt a sigh of relief. She thanked Kerri and went downstairs to work her shift.

Allie was working customer service with Kate that night. As soon as Kate walked behind the desk, Allie started venting. "Seriously, if I have to work with Mallory one more time I am going to quit! She is the most unpleasant person I have ever met in my life." Kate was taken aback by this sudden outburst and asked Allie to elaborate. "Mallory has only been here a little over a month and acts like she owns this store. I've asked all the other employees what they think of her and not one person likes her. She has either said something rude or given snotty looks to every person in here. And for some reason, Kerri still seems to love her and looks past it!!!! I don't understand it at all!" "Well", Kate replied, "something about her just rubs me the wrong way. I understand that some people take awhile to warm-up, and I even understand that maybe our personalities don't exactly click but I thought it would be better by now." The store

began to get busy so Kate and Allie didn't have time to talk about it for the rest of the

night.

Monday Night Shift

Kate had Saturday and Sunday off so when she returned to work on Monday

night, she figured she'd hear some news from Kerri about the supervisor position. When

she went to relieve Tina for the night, Tina had a scowl on her face and barely spoke to

Kate. "Wow" Kate thought, "something must have happened today." Kate looked to her

left and saw Kerri handing Mallory supervisor keys. Kate immediately turned to Tina

and asked what was going on. Tina replied "Last week, I filled out my recommendation

to make you front end supervisor and I thought it had been approved. I walk into work

today and Kerri informs me that I am going to be training Mallory to be the new front end

supervisor instead of you. I think I should have some say as to who the supervisor's are

in my department and Kerri went over my head and made this horrible decision without

even consulting me. I've been here for six years and have picked amazing supervisors. I

recommended you for a reason. I refuse to work for a company that goes over my head

and does not take my opinions into consideration." With that, Tina walked off in a huff.

Kate was speechless. In a matter of two days, Kate, who had been a loyal employee to

the company for a year lost the supervisor position to Mallory who had been with the

company a little over a month. Kate, somebody people looked up to and trusted, lost her

position to Mallory, somebody people despised and lacked respect for. At that moment,

Kerri walked past Kate without so much as an explanation or an acknowledgment. The

lines started forming around the customer service desk and Kate had no choice but to

work the rest of her shift. Should Kate stay with the company or should she move on to something else?

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

Conflict needs to be addressed before it reaches the breaking point. Conflict needs to be anticipated and prevented at all costs. Managers need to find a way to deal with each level of conflict whether they utilizes managerial mediation, self-mediation, team mediation, preventative mediation, or a mediator as a neutral third party. Learning how to anticipate, prevent, and solve conflict should be part of an employee training/orientation program. By establishing a supportive climate, giving back to the employees as much as they give to the organization, and distinguishing the company as a mediating organization, employees will be more likely to want to resolve conflict and establish a cooperative organization.

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human performance. *Performance Improvement Quarterly*, 4, 43-54.

APPENDIX A

CASE STUDY OUTLINE

I.   **One Month Ago**
      A. Kate leaves for London for a month
      B. Kerri hints to her that the front-end supervisor position is open to her

II.   **Currently**
      A. Kate has been with Etcetera for a year
      B. She trains new employees, counts down all the drawers, and does front-end damages

III.   **Present Day**
      A. Kate returns from London and notices many changes in the company.
      B. Bill has quit due to stress from the district manager.
      C. Many of the employees have been fired due to low secret shop scores.

IV.   **The Next Morning**
      A. Kate begins training the new girl Mallory who happens to be Kerri's best friend's daughter.
      B. Mallory seems uninterested in anything Kate has to say and is unfriendly to all of Etcetera's other employees.
      C. Kate continues to train Mallory and Mallory continues to treat Kate badly.
      D. Kate decides she needs to meet with Kerri to discuss her position of front-end supervisor which has not been brought up since Kate left for London.

V.   **Friday Night Shift**
      A. Kate goes into work Friday night and has a meeting with Kerri.
      B. Kerri informs Kate that although the decision is not official yet, Kate has the position "in the bag."
      C. Kate goes downstairs to work her shift with her best friend Allie.
      D. Allie informs Kate of how horrible Mallory has been treating all of the employees and how nobody likes Mallory.

VI.   **Monday Night Shift**
      A. Kate had the weekend off so she came into work expecting the front-end supervisor position.
      B. When Kate walks downstairs, she sees Kerri handing Mallory the supervisor keys.
      C. Kate asks Tina, her immediate supervisor what is going on.
      D. Tina informs Kate that she put in the recommendation for Kate to become supervisor but Kerri went over her head and made Mallory the supervisor instead.

VII. <u>Conclusion</u>

        A. The case ends with Kerri walking past Kate without speaking to her or acknowledging her.

        B. The reader is asked what Kate should do. Should she stay with the company? Should she talk to Kerri? What actions should she take?

APPENDIX B

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

Case Study Overview:

Kate has been working for Etcetera for the past year. Before leaving for London to study abroad for the month of June, she is promised the position of front-end supervisor by her manager Kerri. When Kate returns a month later, things have changed drastically at Etcetera. One of the managers, Bill quit the company due to stress and inconsistencies with the district manager. Many of Etcetera's part-time employees have been fired due to the change in the organizational climate and only a few originals remain including one of Kate's best friends, Allie. Kate is placed in charge of training a new cashier named Mallory. Mallory is extremely rude and seems to care nothing about maintaining a friendly environment or trying to fit into the organization. All the employees and supervisors dislike Mallory except for Kerri. Mallory happens to be Kerri's best friend's daughter. Kate finishes training Mallory and wonders why Kerri has not mentioned the supervisor position to her again. Kerri tells Kate that it is not official yet but the position is as good as hers. Kate has the weekend off and when she returns on Monday, Mallory is being trained as front-end supervisor instead of Kate.

Learning Objectives:
To better understand the many forms of conflict and the appropriate means of resolution. To teach employees and students how to utilize the different conflict resolution strategies so they can apply it to their own organizational conflicts.

Key Characters:

Kate:
~ worked for Etcetera for the past year
~ promised the position of front-end supervisor before she leaves for London
~ trains new employees
~ liked and respected by employees and managers at Etcetera

Kerri:
~ manager at Etcetera
~ makes final promotion decisions

Mallory:
~ new employee at Etcetera
~ has a personal relationship with Kerri
~ rude and unfriendly to Etcetera employees

Tina:
~ Kate's immediate supervisor
~ been with Etcetera for six years
~ recommends front-end supervisors

Allie:
~ Kate's best friend at Etcetera
~ one of the few employees not fired with management changes
~ promoted from bedding to bridal

Bill:
~ manager at Etcetera
~ quit the company because of inconsistencies with the district manager

Key Concepts:
Conflict: There are six characteristics that distinguish a conflict. They include interdependency, number of interested parties, constituent representation, negotiator authority, critical urgency, and communication channels. The degree of these six characteristics vary according to the situation at hand.

Managerial Mediation: A diagnostic tool for use by managers, supervisors, team leaders, and others that involves a simple form of third-party mediation to resolve conflict between two employees for whose performance the manager is responsible.

Self-Mediation: A diagnostic tool for use by individuals who are personally involved with conflict with another person with whom they have an ongoing interdependent relationship.

Team Mediation: A diagnostic tool for use by team leaders for resolving disputes among members that involves the leader acting as a low-power, neutral third party.

Preventative Mediation: A diagnostic tool for use by members and leaders of working groups that applies two guiding principles drawn from the practice of mediation and enables non-adversarial management of differences in all important relationships.

Dominating Organization: One in which power contests are the prevailing approach to resolving conflicts.

Litigating Organizations: One in which rights contests are the prevailing approach to resolving conflicts.

Mediating Organizations: One in which interest reconciliation is the prevailing approach to resolving conflicts.

Organizational Culture: The rights, values, rituals, and norms for an organization.

Organizational Climate: The internal environment of an organization that is perceived and experienced by its members, influences their behavior, and can be described in terms of the values of a particular set of characteristics of the organization. Organizations with supportive climates include description, problem orientation, spontaneity, equality, empathy, and provisionalism. Organizations with defensive climates include evaluation, control, strategy, neutrality, superiority, and certainty.

Equity Theory: Individuals in the organizations consider what they contribute to the organization with respect to the rewards they get from the organization. Employees then compare these input-output ratios with the perceived input-output ratios of others. If subordinates feel that they get as much from the organization as they put in, they will tend to be more satisfied and have higher levels of liking for their superiors.

Burn-Out: exhaustion of physical or emotional strength usually as a result of prolonged stress or frustration

Emotion: A relatively short term evaluative response essentially positive or negative in nature involving distinct somatic (and often cognitive) components. Emotion, then, refers to the actual experience of feeling in a situation, for example, feeling angry, depressed, excited, resentful, or satisfied (Johnson, Ford, & Kaufman).

Secret Shop: This occurs in most retail organizations. An undercover customer enters the store and quizzes employees on items of the month and grades them on knowledge, friendliness, and helpfulness. The store receives a score out of 100 and then makes adjustments accordingly.

Discussion Questions:

1. How does Equity Theory relate to conflict resolution? Organizational climate?

2. What is the organizational climate at Etcetera before Kate leaves for Europe?

3. What is the organizational climate at Etcetera after Kate returns from Europe?

4. What do you think led to these changes?

5. How could this have been prevented?

6. Which conflict resolution management strategy/strategies would have been the most effective in preventing Bill from quitting the organization?

7. What can be done to prevent burn-out from occurring in organizations (especially retail)?

8. Which conflict resolution management strategy/strategies should Kate use to address Mallory receiving the supervisor position over her?

9. What conflict resolution management strategy/strategies should Kerri employ to calm the arising conflict?

10. Since retail is known to have a high turn-over rate, how can Kerri keep her current employees from quitting because of her decision to make Mallory front-end supervisor instead of Kate?

Teaching Activity:
Split class into four groups:

Group One: Imagine you are Bill. You have had problems with the district manager for quite some time. The district manager has been lying to you about the status of your upper level supervisors and is slowly sending them to other stores to become store managers. He is only giving you one weeks notice to find replacement department managers. This combined with the long hours of retail has led to high stress and burn out. You have a meeting set up with the district manager. What are you going to do?

Group Two: Imagine you are Kate. You have worked for Etcetera for the past year and put in your time of nights and weekends with the hope of getting promoted to front-end supervisor. Everyone in the company likes and respects you and you enjoy your job. You are promised the position of front-end supervisor and then the position is given to Mallory who has only been with the company for less than a month. What are you going to do?

Group Three: Imagine you are Kerri. Bill has just quit so you are on your own to run the store. The climate is hostile because many part-time employees have been fired because of the low secret shop scores. Employee moral is down and you just hired Mallory instead of Kate. What are you going to tell Kate? What are you going to tell Tina? What are you going to tell your employees to regain their trust and respect?

Group Four: Imagine you are Mallory. Your mom is friends with Kerri and that is how you entered the organization. You don't especially like anyone in the organization and don't care to get to know anyone. You were just given the position of front-end supervisor after a little over a month. There is animosity towards you from the rest of the employees because the position was supposed to go to Kate. What are you going to do?

Debriefing Focus:

There is a great deal to fix at Etcetera. There are small problems that cannot be fixed until the larger problems are addressed. The issue of the district manager being inconsistent with management at Etcetera needs to be addressed so that management at Etcetera knows what is occurring with their employees and supervisors. This will reduce stress and create a less hostile climate. The organizational climate needs to be

reestablished as a supportive climate rather than defensive one. Kerri needs to find a way to regain the trust of her employees and make them understand her rationale for hiring Mallory over Kate.

Using an understanding of Equity Theory, managers can find ways to maximize rewards so employees put into the organization what they expect to get out of it. If employees like Kate put in a great deal of time such as nights and weekends, gained the support and trust of fellow employees and managers in order to be promoted, her reward should have been the position of front end supervisor. Since the position was giving to somebody else, Kate is not going to put as much effort into the organization, since she knows she was passed up for the promotion.

Conflict needs to be addressed before it reaches the breaking point. Conflict needs to be anticipated and prevented at all costs. Kerri needs to find a way to deal with each level of conflict whether she utilizes managerial mediation, self-mediation, team mediation, preventative mediation, or a mediator as a neutral third party. Learning how to anticipate, prevent, and solve conflict should be part of an employee training/orientation program. By establishing a supportive climate, giving back to the employees as much as they give to the organization, and distinguishing the company as a mediating organization, employees will be more likely to want to resolve conflict and establish a cooperative organization.