Conflict Resolution In Today's Business In View Of Biblical Guidelines

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Abstract: This article studies the effects and sources of conflict on today's business. The authors considered biblical guidelines and how effective it is to resolving conflict in a business organization. The results suggest that, if the channel of grievances is established and fair hearing is conducted then the parties in conflict can easily resolve their differences. Finally, the article reports evidence that biblical guidelines if adequately follow or implemented, even though conflict is part of day – to –day lifestyle, yet it will yield to positive outcome.

Keywords: conflict, resolution, business, biblical guideline

I. INTRODUCTION

Often times, people disagree with one another. Some of these disagreements though may be job related if well-handled are more likely to be temporal and can be easily settled. However, the nature of conflict is inevitable, it is therefore of important that people in relationships admit and acknowledge its inevitability and hence, learn how to manage or resolve (Dickson & Alu 2012). Disagreement tends to be temporal when addressed early, however, it may become complex when overlooked or neglected. Again, since conflict manifests anywhere you find relationship either between an individual, a group or between groups (Kenneth & James 2001) and even day to day process in human relations (Nwaomah, 2009), the focus of this study lies on the impact that unresolved disagreement, conflict, may cause to a business.

Conflict is possible in all walks of life whether it be disagreement between friends, parents, relatives or workmate, a complaint about a family, product or service or at extreme, war between nations.

Mescon, Boveec, & Thill (1999), emphasis more on the ability to manage conflict over many skills in a team. Hence, Withers & Wisinski (2007) in Borniger et al have this to say, how we behave during conflict is generally a result of our views on conflict: "is conflict a contest to win, a problem to solve, or an opportunity to learn?" Dealing with each of these scenarios and questions determines or serves as a guide towards resolving the conflict itself. This is apparent because conflicts affect job performance, and managers must deal with it. As suggested by its title, this article seeks to offer strategies for conflict resolution in today's business in view of biblical guidelines.

II. THE CONCEPT OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

According to Wikipedia.org (2016) process of applying non-violent resistance measures to conflicted parties in an attempt to promote resolution that is effective can be term as conflict resolution.

According to Kenneth and James (2001), conflict arises when another person's interference affect the achievement and goals of another. When the party involves perceived that its interests are being negatively affected or about to be affected by another party (Hellriegel, Slocum, and Woodman, 1998) this is also the view of Leslie and Lloyd (2005)

In the word of Mescon et al (1999), conflict is seen as the antagonistic interactions resulting from differences in ideas, opinions and goals or ways of doing things. Cottringer (1997) in Leslie & Lloyd (2005) view conflict from an organizational perspective as anything that disrupts the "normal" routine.

On the other hand, Wolff and Nagy (2016) opines that resolution is a way for two or more parties to find a peaceful solution to a disagreement among them. The disagreement may be personal, financial, political, or emotional.

According to Wikipedia (2016), Conflict resolution is conceptualized as the methods and processes involved in facilitating the peaceful ending of social conflict. Going by these definitions, conflict resolution therefore can be viewed as the act or process of settling dispute or disagreements which may occur as a

differences in the ideas, opinion, interest and goal of individuals or groups in the society. It is important to note that conflict resolution differs a great deal from conflict management and should not be seen as one and the same thing. Where conflict resolution focuses on resolving the disagreement to the acceptance of one or both parties involves, conflict management rather have to do with ongoing process that may not end in resolution, it is a process of managing the situation. This implies that the former eventually comes to an end if treated or handled effectively, but the latter is an ongoing process that is being managed.

III. CAUSES OF CONFLICT

Mescon et al, (1999) states the possible causes of team conflict. Which may include:

First, competition which may arise due to declining or scare resources such as money, supplies and information (as in the case of Abraham and Lot, The Bible, Contemporary English Version in Genesis 13:5-18); Sometimes, prosperity comes with attendant challenges or problem. In his word, Norman Duncan expresses the situation of Abraham in this way:

> *"As soon as Abraham and his family came to the Promised Land and he was*
> *restored at Bethel, things again started going wrong. His prosperity brought*
> *a problem, a difficulty. The problem was the striving and quarrelling between*
> *the herdsmen of Abraham and Lot" (Duncan, 2002 in Dickson & Alu, 2012).*

Conflict resulted due to the abundance of their wealth – the available grazing land was small for their livestock. The scarcity of available pastureland, and sometimes of water, resulted in conflict between Abram's herdsmen and those of Lot. Each group naturally wanted to see his master's possessions prosper (Nichol, 1978).

Second, people may disagree about who is responsible for a specific task (as in the disciple's case of who will be the greatest according to Mark 9:33-35), this may arose due to poorly defined responsibilities and job boundaries.

Third, misunderstanding and misperception among team members or other teams may result from poor communication. Daniel Shapiro (2004) opines that the presence of differing perceptions and poor communication often fueled conflict (men from Judea's view on salvation as in Acts 15:1-2, where they claims that salvation only comes by circumcision after the manner of Moses, hence, the Gentiles cannot be saved except they were circumcised). However, lack of adequate or withholding of information intentionally has an unbearable effect among members as it undermine their trust. Shapiro (2004) observes that:

> *Major aspect of negative discrimination and prejudice arises when*
> *people view others as being dissimilar, and in certain cases, as not even*
> *sharing human functions…. Also, prejudice is an opinion, often*
> *unfavorable, about a subject or group that is formed before exploring all*
> *of its facets… And discrimination occurs when one acts out a prejudiced*
> *belief and, therefore, treats people unfairly.*

Fourth, another factor that led to clashes or conflict is the differences in values, personalities and attitudes (as in the contention between the brethren in Corinth, "I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ" in 1Cor. 1:10-17).

Fifth, exerting power on others or questioning of the authority of another or when people or teams perceived to be limited in their authority tend to exert more influence or increase their power which result in power struggle (as applies to the reason behind the Jerusalem council on whether circumcision was binding on the Gentiles in Acts 15:1-12 as some men came from Judea to exert their power on the Gentiles).

Sixth, conflict can arise because individuals or teams are pursuing different goals (an evidence in the persecution faced by Paul and Barnabas in Iconium by the unbelieving Jews in Acts 14:1-7).

Shay and Margaret McConnon (2008) suggested the possible cost of conflict to the individual and organization: they argued that most conflict is destructive to human relationship, emotion and may even cause health problems. As it may result in loss of confidence, hostility, power struggles, unhappiness, withdrawal and even illness. However, the cost to the organization affect both the productivity, and profit turnover. The result came with absenteeism, wasted employee time, low morale and poor teamwork, missed opportunity, higher staff turnover and inefficiency.

IV. CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGIES IN THE BIBLE

Conflict is part of human life; therefore the scripture is not void of them. The following are the few examples of how conflicts were resolved in the Bible:

I. *Abram and Lot Separate (Genesis 13:1-12)*

Abraham returned to Canaan from Egypt "very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold". Ellen G. White (2000), said, "Lot was still with him, and again they came to bethel, and pitched their tents by the altar which

they had before erected". She observed that, "they soon found that increased possessions brought increased trouble. In the midst of hardships and trial they had dwelt together in harmony, but in their prosperity there was danger of strife between them"

> *The pasturage was not sufficient for the flocks and herds of both....*
> *It was evident that they must separate. Abraham was Lot's senior*
> *in years, and his superior in relation, in wealth and in position; yet*
> *he was the first to propose plans for preserving peace. Although*
> *the whole land had been given him by God Himself, he*
> *courteously waived his right....(White 1970)*

A brief background to this case was written in Genesis 13:5-7;

> *"And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents. And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together. And there was a strife between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and the herdsmen of Lot's cattle: and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land."*

Principles to be noted from this case study
II. The abundance of livestock than available grazing land led to the conflict. Vs. 5 & 6
III. Quarrelling between Abram's and Lot's servants. Vs. 7
IV. Abram called Lot for resolution – 'And Abram said to Lot, "Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren." vs. 8
V.   Abram propose solution – "Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or, if you go to the right, then I will go to the left." vs. 9
VI. Abram and Lot separated vs. 12

Lessons for Today's Business
- Conflicts between under workers can crumble the business if note is not taken or nonchalantly overlooked.
- Workers must be made to realize that they are stakeholders – "we are close relatives" vs 8; according to Towns, "Abram's twofold appeal to bring an end to the strife was based on an appeal to their humanity and family" (Towns 1989).
- Emphasize mutual benefits to both parties – "there is plenty of land for you to choose from" vs. 9a
- Separation may be the best solution, but without resentment[1]– "let's separate, if you go North, I'll go South": vs. 9b
- One party will always be at disadvantage but should be accepted in comradeship spirit – "Lot chose the plains. Abram selflessly took what was left" (McCain, 2002).

VII. Abraham Household Conflict: Gen 16 & 21.
"Thinking it impossible that a child should be given her in her old age, Sarah suggested, as a plan by which the divine purpose might be fulfilled, that one of her handmaidens should be taken by Abraham as a secondary wife . . . . Abraham's marriage with Hagar resulted in evil . . . flattered with the honor of her new position as Abraham's wife, and hoping to be the mother of the great nation to descend from him; Hagar became proud and boastful, and treated her mistress with contempt" (White, 2000).

Principles to be noted from this case study
i.   Sarah was not productive
ii. Hagar productivity makes her proud and tending bossy towards Sarah her boss
iii. Sarah's harsh treatment makes her ran away from home
iv. Hagar's encounter with an Angel taught her a lesson of submission and was asked to return to Sarah
v.   Since Sarah had become productive, she requested Abraham to get rid of Hagar and Ismael her son; to avoid competition over the family's inheritance
vi. God asked him to do likewise.

Lessons
Unproductivity can be a cause of conflict, especially when a junior worker seems to be doing well and better than those in managerial position. If the junior worker is not submissive it may lead to termination of his or her

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[11] Lot separation was not the end to the family tie; see Genesis 14 when Abram rescues Lot and chapter 18 when Abraham prays for Sodom.

appointment or rather, a threat to an unproductive boss. "Under the legal code of Hammurabi a maid who had elevated to the status of slave-wife could be returned to her status as maid, but not expelled from the household" (Towns, 1989).

VIII. *Personal Conflict in Bible: Matthew 18:15-17.*
The principles here are:
i.   Discussion of issue on a personal basis (one to one)
ii. If not resolved, involve witnesses (two or more other persons)
iii. If he neglects to hear them, and will not be humbled, then tell it to the church (larger body)
iv. "If he neglects the church, if he slights the admonition and will neither be ashamed of his faults nor amend them,
v.   Then, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and publican, let him be cast of the communion of the church, secluded from special ordinances, degraded from the dignity of a church member.
vi. Let him be put under disgrace, and let the members of the society be warned to withdraw from him (that is, disclaimer) that he may be ashamed of his sins, and they may not be infected by it or made changeable, with it"(Henry, 2008).
It is worthy of note that private admonitions must always go before public censures.

IX. *The Early Church Conflict: (Acts 15:1-2)*
A brief background to this case was written in Acts 15:1-2;

> *And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren,*
> *"Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you*
> *cannot be saved." Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small*
> *dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and*
> *Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem,*
> *to the apostles and elders, about this question.*

"The question was warmly discussed in the assembly. Intimately connected with the question of circumcision were several others demanding careful study" (White, 2000).

Lessons and principles to learn
Established channel of grievances
i.   There was a meeting at Jerusalem
ii. The problem was discussed/debated in order to reach a compromise/consensus.
iii. At the meeting, Peter reviews the previous incident or related issue in the past
Fair-hearing
i.   There was a fair hearing/evidence: Paul and Barnabas were given the opportunity to speak.
ii. The leader of the council (James) reviewed the issue based on the evidences and biblical agreement – their constitution.
Resolution
1.   There was policy formulation for lasting solution. Hence, it was decided that a letter should be sent to the Gentiles to avoid:
* Eating meat offered to idols
* Eating meat of animals strangled or that has blood.
* Committing any terrible sexual sins.

V. CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN TODAY'S BUSINESS IN VIEW OF BIBLICAL GUIDELINES

Conflicts can be resolved in various ways. Since each situation differs, managers must decide which type of strategy will best resolve each conflict.
According to Kenneth and James (2001), there are three strategies of resolving conflict:
1.   Avoidance Strategy: one of the strategy used to resolve conflict is to agree with another person's position even though it may differs from your personal belief or rather take a neutral position. This approach avoids the conflict. This is a biblical principle applied during the conflicts in Abraham household which is applicable in today's business.

> *Then Sarai said to Abram, "My wrong be upon you! I gave my maid into*
> *your embrace; and when she saw that she had conceived, I became*
> *despised in her eyes. The Lord judge between you and me". So Abram said*
> *to Sarai, "Indeed your maid is in your hand; do to her as you please." And*

when Sarai dealt harshly with her, she fled from her presence. Genesis 16:5-6.
And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she borne to Abraham, scoffing. Therefore she said to Abraham, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, namely with Isaac." And the matter was very displeasing in Abraham's sight because of his son. Genesis 21:9-11

2. Compromise Strategy: another way in resolving conflict is to seek a compromise rows by having a thorough discussion of the goals and how best to achieve those goals. This strategy is prefer to avoidance because it usually leads to a workable solution, since parties involved personally contributes to the decision. Hence, there is a tendency to a lasting solution, since parties involved will more likely support a compromise solution they have helped to develop.

"Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" Amos 3:3

'And Abram said to Lot, "Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren." "Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or, if you go to the right, then I will go to the left." Genesis 13:8-9

"therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood....then it pleased the Apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren. Acts 15:19, 20, 22.

3. Win/Lose Strategy: this is most dangerous approach used to resolve conflict. In this case, the parties are not willing to compromise, therefore, one wins while the other loses.
   And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she borne to Abraham, scoffing. Therefore she said to Abraham, "Cast out this bondwoman and her son..." So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water; and putting it on her shoulder, he gave it and the boy to Hagar, and sent her away.... Genesis 21:9-10, 14.

To them, A win/lose strategy is never acceptable to everyone, although people often engage in such a strategy. This strategy interferes with the performance of organizational goals as they often:
i. Consume energy and time since the main problems and issues were avoided.
ii. Delay decisions.
iii. Arouse anger that hurts human relationships and,
iv. Cause personal resentment which can lead to other problems.

In their conclusion, win/lose strategies are destructive and that it shouldn't be an alternative strategy for managers in solving organizational conflict. To avoid win/lose strategies by the managers, they should set a clear objectives understood and agree on by the employees, ensuing cooperation in reaching objectives and working as a team to reach solution when special problems or disagreements arises.
However, Leslie and Lloyd (2005) proposed five general approaches that can be used in resolving conflict situations.
1. Compromising
2. Soothing over the conflict: this happens when manager acts like the conflict does not exist. Managers using approach often pretend. "We are all one big happy family". They observe that this is not the best method since it rather lead to more conflict.
   "If one of my follower sins against you, go and point out what was wrong. But do it in private, just between the two of you. If that person listens, you have won back a follower. But if thou one refuses to listen, take along one or two others. The scriptures teach that every complaint must be proven true by two or more Witnesses. If the follower refuses to

> *listen to them, report the matter to the church. Anyone who refuses to listen to the church must be treated like an unbeliever or a tax collector."- Matthew 18:15-17 (CEV)*

4. Forcing a Solution: This happen when a superior party, such as manager, or another third party forces a solution on the conflicting partner. For example a manager, observing a conflict between two employees might step in and 'resolving' it in his own way, not really considering the issue at hand properly. This kind of solution will rather sow the seeds for future conflict.

This principle is not vividly observed in the Bible, unless in the cases of Abraham household conflict; but God as a third party, came in to comfort Abraham and upheld the promise he made to him.

> *"Abraham was worried about Ishmael. But God said, "Abraham, don't worry about your slave woman and the boy. Just do what Sarah tells you. Isaac will inherit your family Name, but the son of the slave woman is also your son, and I will make his descendants into a great nation" Genesis 21:11-13 (CEV)*

5. Confrontation: this is an open discussion between the parties where each party express their feelings and what is bothering them. With this method, each party discusses their true feelings and also listens to what the other parties have to say.

> *"Some people came from Judea and started teaching The Lord's followers that they could not be saved, unless they were circumcised as Moses had taught. This caused Trouble, and Paul and Barnabas argued with them about this teaching. So it was decided to send Paul and Barnabas and a few others to Jerusalem to discuss this problem with the apostles and the church leaders"*

Although, each of these methods can work in certain situations, confrontation is generally considered to be the most effective method of resolving conflicts; third-party intervention has been found to be the least effective method, because resolutions reached through confrontation tends to be more long-lasting (DuBose & Pringle 1989).

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to maximize the constructive aspect of the conflict and speed up resolution while minimizing the destructive consequences, the manager should make sure the participants are aware of the following ground rules for constructive confrontation opines Leslie & Lloyd (2005):

1. There is a need to review the past actions of the parties and established the issues causing the conflict, then confrontation can now begin (as in early church conflict resolution – Acts 15)
2. Encourage the participants to communicate freely. They should get their personal feelings out in the open and should not hold back grievances (fair hearing) – Acts 15:12
3. Placing blame on any party will rather polarizes the participant – Gen. 16:5
4. Confrontations should be adequately prepared for by both parties, and by no means must it come as a surprise – Gen 21:10,11
5. Areas that are sensitive to either party which have nothing to do with the specific conflict should not be brought into it – Gen 21:8-10
6. Keep to specific issues: do not argue aimlessly – Acts 15:2
7. Identify areas of mutual agreement – Acts 15:23-30
8. Don't jump into specific solutions quickly – Gen. 16:3,4; Acts 15:1
9. Emphasize mutual benefits to both parties. – Gen. 13:8,9
10. Participants should be encouraged to examine their own feelings and biases - Acts 15:5-11
11. Ensure that all participants say all they want to say as the intensity of the confrontation is maintained. Agree on what are to be taken towards resolving the conflict (either to cast the person away or otherwise) Acts 15:19-23

VII. CONCLUSION

Conflict in organizations is often assumed to be unnatural and undesirable, sometimes to be avoided at all costs. However, conflict is perfectly natural and should be expected to occur. Today's managers must accept the existence of conflict and realize that to attempt to stop all is a mistake.

The general consensus is that conflict itself is not undesirable; rather, it is a phenomenon that can have constructive or destructive effects in an organization; whilst some conflict in an organization may be a good thing because it can lead to the generation of new ideas; Serious or prolonged conflicts is likely to be damaging

and lead to inefficiency if not resolved. However, the manager must be able to see these constructive effects and weigh them against the costs. Therefore, conflict must be managed (resolved) in order to achieve consensus, that is, a broad agreement which minimizes the problem and enables the organization to function effectively.

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