



EFFECTIVENESS OF MEDIATION STRATEGY, INCLUDING FACILITATION, IN RESOLVING INTER-GROUP CONFLICTS WITHIN ORGANIZATIONS: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF ORGANIZATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY

¹Siriwardana, G.K.Y.S. & ²Siriwardhana, Chamila

¹²Department of Philosophy, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka

*¹Corresponding Author Email : yasadisiriwardana05@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This research study investigates the effectiveness of mediation strategies, including facilitation, in resolving inter-group conflicts within organizations and their impact on productivity in the Sri Lankan apparel industry. The study employs qualitative research design, utilizing semi-structured interviews, Key Informant Interviews (KII), and focused group discussions (FGD) to capture diverse perspectives and experiences. The sampling strategy encompasses three organizational levels, including HR managers, supervisors, and grassroots-level employees from the apparel industry in the Western Province.

The data collection methods include semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, particularly supervisors from identified sections, to explore the nuanced experiences, perspectives, and emotions surrounding inter-group conflicts within an organizational context. Key Informant Interviews (KII) are conducted with HR managers to extract comprehensive insights into organizational policies and existing mechanisms for conflict resolution. Focused group discussions tap into collective perspectives, experiences, and opinions concerning inter-group conflicts within the organization. Thematic analysis is applied to qualitative data, revealing patterns and insights from interviews, focus group discussions, and Key Information Interviews (KII). Organizational productivity reports and annual reports are scrutinized to objectively assess changes in productivity resulting from mediation and other conflict resolution strategies.

The literature review explores four crucial areas: organization structure, mediation, facilitation, and their impact on organizational productivity in resolving inter-group conflicts. The study highlights key findings and contributions to understanding mediation strategies in resolving inter-group conflicts. It underscores practical implications for organizational frameworks, providing recommendations for integrating mediation

techniques proactively. The conclusion reflects on the broader significance of the study, addressing its limitations and proposing avenues for future research. Ultimately, the study reinforces the transformative potential of mediation in shaping harmonious organizational ecosystems and fostering enduring productivity.

KEYWORDS: *Mediation, Conflict Resolution, Apparel Industry, Productivity*

1. Introduction

Inter-group conflicts within organizations can disrupt efficiency, teamwork, and overall productivity. These conflicts often stem from communication breakdowns, role ambiguity, and competing interests. This study explores how mediation strategies, particularly facilitation, contribute to resolving such conflicts. The research focuses on the Sri Lankan apparel industry, a sector characterized by high levels of teamwork and interdependencies. By examining the role of mediation, the study aims to provide insights into effective conflict resolution techniques that improve organizational productivity.

Mediation strategies have evolved as organizations recognize the need for proactive conflict resolution mechanisms. While traditional mediation focuses on resolving disputes post-conflict, facilitation emphasizes preemptive engagement to address tensions before they escalate. By employing facilitation as a mediation strategy, organizations can foster constructive dialogue, encourage collaboration, and enhance operational efficiency.

2. Review of Literature

2.1. Productivity of Organization

2.1.1. Define the productivity of the organization

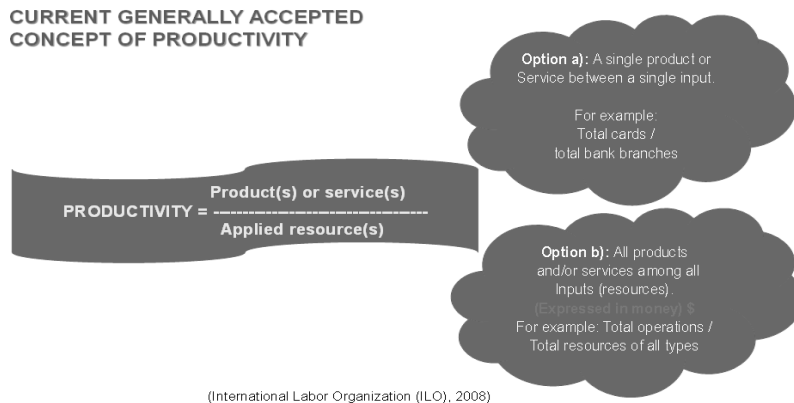
Productivity is a ratio to measure how well an organization converts input resources (labor, materials, machines, money) into goods and services (Tokarčíková, 2013). Dorgan (1994) defines productivity as “the increased functional and organizational performance, including quality”, and Rolloos (1997) claims that “productivity is that which people can produce with the least effort”. Nda & Fard (2013) describe employee productivity as the measure of output per unit of input economically. Rohan and Madhumita (2012) adopt a different view and see employee productivity as the log of net sales over total employees. Pritchard (1995) illustrates three definitions which relate to productivity:

1. is output/input, in other words, is a measure of efficiency

2. is a composition of effectiveness and efficiency
3. whatever makes the organization function better.

It is worth noting and of particular interest in this study, whereby the context of the research is grounded in the public sector, and researchers argue the differences in performance and productivity in the public sector versus the private sector (see Parker, Waller & Hu, 2013).

Figure 1 Current generally accepted concept of productivity



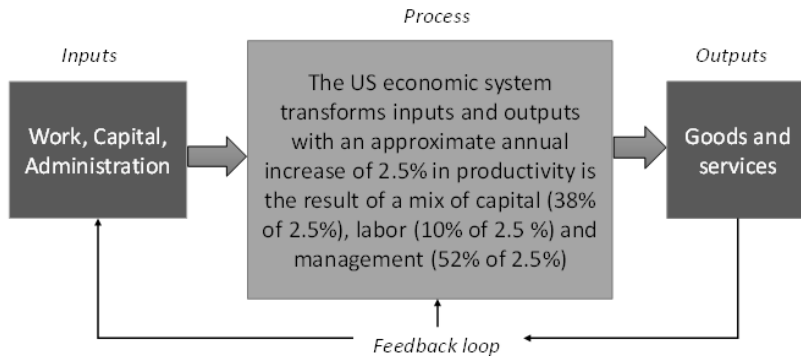
Source: International Labor Organization, 2008.

Equation 1: Measure of the productivity of organization

$\text{Organizational productivity} = \frac{\text{Input of the organization}}{\text{Output of the organization}}$

- ❖ **Output:** Quantifiable measure of your organization's achievements (e.g., units produced, sales generated, projects completed).
 - ❖ **Input:** Quantifiable measure of resources used to achieve the output (e.g., labor hours, machine time, materials consumed).
- (Certo, S. C., & Certo, S. T. (2018). *Modern management: Concepts and theories* (14th ed.). Pearson).

Figure 2: The process of input and output



(CEUPE, 2022)

Sources: CEUPE,2002

2.1.2. Organizational productivity metrics

Productivity metrics are a way to quantify the productivity of employees. They measure the various activities of employees related to the company's goals and help highlight opportunities for improvement and maximize efficiency. Productivity metrics can be either quantitative or qualitative. A common way to track productivity is to use key performance indicators (KPIs) to understand how product employees are relative to their goals. It can be tough to measure productivity in many jobs. For example, how do you measure the productivity of a marketing manager? Or an events planner? It's not as simple as a manufacturing job where the input and output are quite straightforward. While the objective of measuring productivity is to increase efficiency, setting unreasonable productivity metrics can be harmful to motivation, engagement, and, ultimately, productivity. It's not always possible to achieve 100% quality as you're pushing productivity levels. Instead, finding the right combination between productivity and efficiency helps maximize output while maintaining quality.

There are various ways to calculate productivity in different sectors. Because it's impossible to have common productivity metrics for every job, we give examples of productivity metrics for different departments, as well as organization-wide metrics and generally applicable metrics. (AIHR (2023). 12 Productivity Metrics Examples

For Working Effectively. Retrieved from.

<https://www.aihr.com/blog/productivitymetrics/>:

2.2. Mediation

Mediation is a structured and facilitated settlement method that involves a neutral professional facilitator called a “mediator” who helps impartially and independently the parties to try to settle (Chau,2007; Frame and Reynolds, 2010). The mediator conducts the proceedings by taking account of the general circumstances of the case, the business relationship of the parties, the parties’ wishes, and the need for a speedy and economical settlement.

A mediator’s behavior is critical in determining the success or failure of mediation. Scholars categorize a mediator’s behavior into different types of strategies he or she may use with the parties in conflict (Bercovitch and Houston 1993). Approximately twenty-five have been reported, including evaluative (Della Noce 2009; Riskin 1996; Wall and Chan-Serafi n 2014), pressing (Carnevale and Pruitt 1992; Wall and Chan-Serafi n 2014), neutral (Kydd 2003; Wall and Chan-Serafi n 2014), facilitating (Gabel 2003; Kressel 2007; Riskin 1996), narrative (Hardy 2008), problem solving (Harper 2006), strategic (Kressel 2007), pragmatic (Alberstein 2007), transformative (Bush and Folger 1994; Kressel 2007), deal-making and orchestration (Kolb 1983), and trust caucus (Poitras 2013). Wall and Chan-Serafi n (2014) categorized a mediator’s behavior into pressing, evaluative, and neutral strategies. Kressel (2007) classified a mediator’s behavior into facilitating, evaluative, strategic, and transformative strategies. Sheppard (1984) identifies three types of intervention strategies: process control, content control, and motivational control. Kolb (1994) observed a great number of mediators using various strategies and divided these strategies into two groups, labeled dealmakers and orchestrators. The dealmakers often offer their opinions and make independent suggestions or recommendations. They attempt to control the process and the content of the negotiations and provide additional motivation for the parties to make the deal. By contrast, the orchestrators tend to take a more passive role in mediation and prefer that the parties handle a conflict themselves with only limited help from the mediator (Baker and Ross 1992).

This study mainly focuses on the strategy of mediation: facilitating. This choice was partly based on the classifications of conflict mediation strategies offered by Wall and Chan-Serafi n (2014) and Kressel (2007).

In the facilitating strategy, a mediator attempts to help the disputants find a compromise, giving both conflicting parties equal opportunities for participation in solving the conflict. The pressing strategy describes a mediator’s behavior as criticizing the conflicting parties and making them do what a mediator wants them to do. In the neutral strategy, a mediator does not take part in a conflict process but mainly performs the role of an observer.

The definition of the neutral strategy requires clarification. Neutrality may have two meanings. First, the neutral strategy means that a mediator is impartial. Impartiality is his or her “critical defining characteristic” (Macfarlane 2003). Brenninkmeijer (2009) defined mediation as a form of intervening in conflicts in which a neutral independent

expert guides the communication and negotiations between the parties to reach agreements about desired behaviors and solutions, both based on the parties' interests. Mediators should show the parties that they have no interest in favoring one party over another. In this sense, mediation is always neutral because a mediator is not an arbiter. Mediators take on the role of a neutral third party, facilitating communication and assisting the parties in working out a mutually acceptable solution.

Second, a neutral mediator may not be too much involved in the process of negotiation, instead playing the passive role of the orchestrator in Kolb's taxonomy. We considered a mediator's neutral strategy mostly in the second sense of nonintervention. We supposed that a passive observer is a mediator because his or her physical presence influences the conflict party's behavior.

2.3. Facilitation

Facilitative strategy is defined as "a fairly passive role, channeling information to the parties, facilitating co-operation but exhibiting little control over the more formal process or substance of mediation" (Bercovitch, 2000). The tactics associated with this strategy include communication with parties; facilitating interaction between parties; building trust and confidence in the parties; ensuring each party's needs and interests to be included in discussion; developing a dialogue framework (Bercovitch, 2000). Facilitative mediation opens and maintains lines of communication between disputants, by structuring the negotiation so that key issues are given sufficient consideration. Information sharing through facilitative mediation helps parties to clarify individual positions and evaluate more accurately each other's commitment, relative power distribution, and mutually acceptable solutions. As a result, facilitators help rebuild trust between parties (Fisher, 1972), which would contain commitment problems over the long run. The interaction opportunity created by facilitative mediation promotes parties to reach a resolution independently, which is less vulnerable to potential external interferences (Beardsley, 2008). The facilitative strategy could avoid bargaining failures without resorting to enforcement-based strategies. It should be noted, however, that the dialogue opportunity created by facilitative mediation may not necessarily achieve reconciliation or restructuring of the parties' relationship; in other words, facilitative mediation may not resolve the root causes of disputes (Zartman and Touval, 1985).

Here, the mediator tries to help the disputants reach a compromise. He or she pays attention to both parties and makes encouraging and positive remarks. The mediator also points out each disputant's strengths and weaknesses. In such a strategy, the mediator makes suggestions and gives opinions or advises the disputants on steps they should take. This approach, as described by Moore (2012), emphasizes fostering open communication and understanding between the parties. The mediator acts as a neutral guide, assisting in:

- ❖ Structuring the discussion: Establishing ground rules, ensuring fair time allocation, and guiding the conversation towards productive exchange.

- ❖ Active listening: Empathetically acknowledging each party's perspective and emotions.
- ❖ Clarifying issues: Helping parties articulate their needs and interests clearly.
- ❖ Brainstorming solutions: Generating options for mutual benefit through creative problem-solving.

2.3.1. Advantages of facilitation:

- ❖ Promotes a collaborative atmosphere and empowers parties to find solutions themselves.
- ❖ Builds trust and understanding, fostering long-term relationships.
- ❖ Adaptable to diverse conflict styles and personalities.

2.3.2. Disadvantages of facilitation:

- ❖ Can be time-consuming, especially with complex conflicts or entrenched positions.
- ❖ May not be effective in high-conflict situations requiring firmer intervention.

The perceived importance of facilitation compared to other mediation strategies is context-dependent and varies based on the nature of the conflict, organizational culture, and the goals of the mediation process. However, facilitation is often considered crucial for several reasons:

- Preserving Relationships: (Fisher, R., Ury, W., & Patton, B. (2011). "Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In." Penguin Books). (Pruitt, D. G., & Carnevale, P. J. (1993). "Negotiation in Social Conflict." Open University Press.)
- Encouraging Collaboration: (Kolb, D. M. (2014). "The Skilled Facilitator: A Comprehensive Resource for Consultants, Facilitators, Managers, Trainers, and Coaches." Jossey-Bass.)
- Adaptable and Flexible Approach: (Bens, I. (2005). "Facilitation at a Glance: Your Pocket Guide to Facilitation." Jossey-Bass.)
- Building Trust: (emme, D., & Katzel, R. (2017). "The Intersection of Conflict Resolution and Collaboration: Trust in Action." Springer.)
- Empowering Participants: (Kaner, S., Lind, L., Toldi, C., Fisk, S., & Berger, D. (2014). "Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making." Jossey-Bass.)
- Addressing Underlying Issues: (Moore, C. W. (2014). "The Mediation Process: Practical Strategies for Resolving Conflict." John Wiley & Sons.)
- Focus on Interests, Not Positions: (Fisher, R., Ury, W., & Patton, B. (2011). "Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In." Penguin Books.)
- Time and Cost-Efficiency: (Eddy, W. A. (2019). "High Conflict People in Legal Disputes." Springer).

Facilitation has gained widespread recognition and popularity among mediation strategies due to their inherent advantages and significant contributions to effective conflict resolution. Several factors contribute to its prominence, making it a more widely adopted strategy in various organizational and interpersonal contexts.

This chapter has provided a comprehensive overview of the key elements of the research topic: the effectiveness of mediation strategy including facilitation in resolving inter-group conflicts within organizations, with a comparative study of organizational productivity. The significance of understanding the organizational setting as the root of conflicts was emphasized, acknowledging that conflicts can emerge at various levels, departments, and sections within an organization.

The discussion delved into the multifaceted concept of organizational productivity, incorporating internationally recognized equations and unique organizational metrics tailored to this study. Important theoretical frameworks related to organizational productivity were highlighted, providing a foundational understanding for the subsequent analysis.

The section on organizational conflicts identified common reasons for inter-group conflicts, laying the groundwork for understanding the complexities that mediation strategies aim to address. Conflict resolution techniques were explored, setting the stage for a more focused examination of mediation as an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) method.

In the context of ADR, specific attention was given to mediation in Sri Lanka, elucidating the legislative landscape and the key statutes guiding mediation practices. The gaps in existing literature were revealed, particularly in the context of resolving inter-group conflicts using mediation techniques. This study aims to bridge this gap by providing an in-depth analysis of mediation strategies and their impact on organizational productivity within the unique organizational and legislative context of Sri Lanka.

The identified legislative frameworks, including the Mediation Boards Act, Mediation (Special Categories of Disputes) Act, and the recent enactment related to international conventions, underscore the evolving nature of mediation practices in the country. The inconclusive effectiveness of the Commercial Mediation Center of Sri Lanka Act and the relevance of the Civil Procedure Code further add nuances to the mediation landscape.

2.4. Empirical studies

Several empirical studies have delved into the effectiveness of mediation strategies, including facilitation, in resolving inter-group conflicts within organizations. Here are some key empirical research findings:

- ❖ **Study by Bercovitch (2000):**

Bercovitch's study highlighted the importance of facilitative mediation in resolving inter-group conflicts. The research emphasized tactics such as communication, trust-building, and ensuring each party's needs are considered. Facilitative mediation was found to help

parties clarify positions, evaluate commitments, and reach mutually acceptable solutions independently.

❖ **Research by Fisher (1972):**

Fisher's work emphasized how facilitative mediation helps rebuild trust between disputants by maintaining open lines of communication. This study pointed out that facilitative mediation can prevent bargaining failures without resorting to enforcement-based strategies, fostering a resolution that is less susceptible to external interferences.

❖ **Moore's Approach (2012):**

Moore's approach to mediation focused on fostering open communication and understanding between parties. The mediator acts as a neutral party, encouraging positive remarks, pointing out strengths and weaknesses, and providing suggestions to help disputants find a compromise. This approach aims to enhance communication and reach a mutually agreeable solution

Despite the existing empirical research on mediation strategies in resolving inter-group conflicts within organizations, a notable literature gap persists. One significant gap is the limited exploration of how mediation strategies align with the evolving organizational structures and dynamics in modern workplaces. Specifically, there is a need for further research that examines the adaptability of mediation techniques to diverse organizational cultures, the impact of technological advancements on conflict resolution, and the effectiveness of mediation in addressing conflicts arising from virtual work environments. By addressing these aspects, future research can enhance our understanding of how mediation strategies can effectively navigate the complexities of contemporary organizational settings and contribute to improved organizational productivity.

Hart (1998) describes, “the literature review as producing two products: the presentation of information, ideas, data, and evidence to express viewpoints on the nature of the topic, as well as how it is to be investigated. When considering literature reviews beyond the novice level”

3. Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The methodology section of this study outlines the research design, data collection methods, sampling strategies, and analytical approaches used to explore the effectiveness of mediation strategies, particularly facilitation, in resolving inter-group conflicts within the Sri Lankan apparel industry. By adopting a qualitative research approach, the study aims to provide a rich, detailed understanding of the dynamics of conflict resolution and its impact on organizational productivity.

3.2. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design to gain deep insights into the experiences and perceptions of employees at different organizational levels regarding conflict and mediation. Qualitative research is particularly suited to this study as it allows for an exploration of complex social processes and provides rich, detailed data that can reveal underlying patterns and themes.

The research design includes both primary and secondary data collection methods. Primary data are collected through semi-structured interviews, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and focus group discussions (FGDs). These methods are chosen for their ability to capture diverse perspectives and provide in-depth information. Secondary data, including organizational productivity reports and annual reports, are used to supplement and validate the primary data, offering an objective measure of productivity and organizational outcomes.

3.3. Research Area

The research is conducted in the Western Province of Sri Lanka, a key region for the country's apparel industry. The Western Province is home to major industrial hubs, including the Katunayake, Sithawaka, and Biyagama Trade Zones, which are critical centers for garment manufacturing. This region's significance to the apparel industry makes it an ideal context for studying organizational conflicts and mediation strategies.

3.4. Sampling Method

The study employs a purposive sampling strategy to select participants from various hierarchical levels and departments within apparel organizations. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method that allows the researcher to select participants who are most likely to provide relevant and rich data based on their roles and experiences.

Participants are selected from three hierarchical levels within the apparel market: top-level (HR managers and senior management), middle-level (supervisors and department heads), and grassroots-level (operational staff such as cutters, sewers, packers, and ironers). This stratified sampling ensures that the study captures a wide range of perspectives, providing a comprehensive understanding of conflict dynamics and resolution strategies across different organizational levels.

3.5. Data Collection

The data collection methods are designed to gather comprehensive and detailed information from various sources. Each method is tailored to the specific role and level of the participants to ensure that relevant and rich data is collected.

3.5.1. Semi-Structured Interviews:

Conducted with supervisors from different departments within the apparel organizations. Semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility in exploring specific issues while ensuring that key topics are covered. These interviews aim to gather insights into the specific challenges faced by supervisors in managing conflicts and the strategies they employ to resolve them.

3.5.2. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs):

Conducted with HR managers to understand organizational policies and existing conflict resolution mechanisms. KIIs provide an organizational perspective on conflict management and mediation strategies, offering insights into how these policies are developed and implemented at a strategic level.

3.5.3. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):

Conducted with operational staff from various roles within the apparel organizations. FGDs facilitate the exploration of group dynamics and shared experiences among employees, providing a platform for discussing common conflict issues and the effectiveness of mediation strategies. FGDs are particularly useful for understanding the collective experiences and perceptions of employees at the grassroots level.

3.5.4. Secondary Data:

Organizational productivity reports and annual reports are reviewed to provide an objective measure of productivity and organizational outcomes. These reports offer valuable context and help validate the findings from the primary data collection methods.

3.6. Data Analysis

Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis, allowing for the identification of patterns and insights. The findings were integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research objectives. Comparative analysis was also conducted to assess differences in conflict resolution effectiveness between organizations that employ facilitation and those that rely on traditional mediation methods.

4. Limitations of the Study

4.1. Generalizability

The study is focused on the Sri Lankan apparel sector, which has distinct organizational structures, work environments, and conflict resolution mechanisms. As a result, the findings may not be widely applicable to other industries with different operational dynamics, such as finance, technology, or healthcare. The unique characteristics of the apparel sector may limit the extent to which mediation and facilitation strategies can be effectively transferred to other organizational settings.

4.2. Cross-Sectional Design

The study employs a cross-sectional research design, capturing data at a single point in time. This approach provides valuable insights into the immediate impact of mediation strategies but does not account for long-term changes in organizational productivity and workplace conflict dynamics. Since mediation outcomes may evolve over time, a longitudinal study would be necessary to assess the sustained effectiveness of facilitation in conflict resolution.

4.3. Social Desirability Bias

Participants may provide responses that align with perceived organizational expectations rather than offering entirely candid feedback. Employees and managers involved in conflict resolution processes may hesitate to express critical viewpoints, leading to potential overestimation of the effectiveness of mediation strategies. This bias could affect the accuracy of findings, particularly in qualitative data gathered through interviews and focus group discussions.

4.4. Resource Constraints

The study is conducted within the constraints of limited time and budget, which may affect the depth of data collection and analysis. A more extensive study with additional resources could have enabled broader participation across different apparel organizations and allowed for a more comprehensive exploration of conflict resolution outcomes. The reliance on qualitative methods, while valuable for capturing detailed perspectives, may also limit the ability to generalize findings across a larger population.

4.5. Mediator Characteristics

The effectiveness of facilitation as a mediation strategy is influenced by the skills, experience, and approach of the mediator. Differences in mediator training, techniques, and personal biases may impact on the consistency of facilitation outcomes. Since mediation effectiveness is not uniform across all facilitators, variations in mediator characteristics introduce an additional variable that may affect the study's conclusions.

5. Findings

5.1. Reason for conflict within organization

The analysis revealed several key reasons for conflicts within the organizations studied, including lack of clear communication and information sharing among different groups, differences in work styles and priorities between departments, perceived unfair treatment by management, personality clashes between employees, and unclear roles and responsibilities.

5.2. Impact of conflict on productivity, efficiency and moral of the organization

Conflicts had significant negative impacts on the organizations, such as decreased productivity and efficiency due to time spent resolving conflicts, low employee morale and job satisfaction, high turnover and absenteeism, strained relationships between groups, and disruption to operations.

5.3. Conflict resolution techniques and strategies used in garment factories

The organizations utilized various conflict resolution techniques, including open communication and dialogue between parties, mediation and facilitation by neutral third-party facilitators, formal grievance procedures, team building exercises, and restructuring of teams to address underlying issues.

5.4. Facilitation as a mediation strategy

Facilitation was highlighted as a particularly effective mediation strategy. It created a neutral space for open dialogue and problem-solving. Skilled facilitators guided conflicting parties towards mutual understanding and collaborative solutions. Facilitation was effective in resolving complex, multi-party conflicts.

6. Recommendations

6.1. Establish Mediation Frameworks

Organizations should integrate structured facilitation programs to manage conflicts proactively. Establishing a dedicated mediation team can enhance workplace harmony and reduce conflicts before they escalate.

6.2. Training in Mediation Techniques

Providing training programs on facilitation skills for HR managers and supervisors can equip them with tools to handle conflicts effectively. Regular workshops should be conducted to reinforce best practices.

6.3. Promote the Culture of Open Communication

Encouraging transparent communication channels within organizations can reduce the likelihood of conflicts escalating. Organizations should implement periodic feedback mechanisms and open forums for discussion.

6.4. Monitor and Evaluate Mediation Outcomes

Organizations should track mediation effectiveness through employee feedback and productivity reports to refine conflict resolution strategies continuously.

7. Conclusion

The study underscores the importance of mediation strategies, particularly facilitation, in resolving inter-group conflicts and improving organizational productivity. Findings suggest that structured mediation frameworks lead to enhanced teamwork, higher employee satisfaction, and better overall efficiency. By integrating facilitation techniques, organizations can create more harmonious and productive work environments.

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