



THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGIES WITHIN NURSING TEAMS

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Abstract

The examination of conflict and nursing has produced an intricate collection of written works. Communication researchers give priority to interaction dynamics and provide well-developed theories. Nurse researchers give priority to the dynamics of a clinical setting. This study provides an overview of the field of organizational conflict studies, highlighting the progress made in social science research. It aims to provide a theoretical basis for conducting conflict research in the field of nursing. In nursing literature, conflict is described as a characteristic of the professional environment, often associated with emotions, namely incivility. Communication literature presents conflict as inherent and purposeful, emphasizing on matters while disregarding emotions. An effective strategy would include considering conflict processes from a communication perspective and understanding the working situation from a nursing one. Collaboratively, communication and nursing scholars may develop a nursing conflict resolution technique that surpasses the individual contributions of each field of study. This review corroborates that conclusion. Initially, it provides a concise overview of the existing body of research on organizational conflict. Subsequently, an examination and evaluation of nursing conflict research is conducted, taking into account conflict communication theory. This analysis emphasizes research that is firmly rooted in the field of social science. This study focuses on the extent of conflict among individuals and the interaction processes involved in conflict management, with a specific emphasis on nurses. However, it also includes other healthcare workers, typically doctors.

Keywords: conflict, nursing, communication, working environment.

1. Introduction

The examination of conflict in the nursing profession has produced an intricate body of literature. Brinkert's (2010) comprehensive analysis offers an up-to-date evaluation of the current understanding of nursing conflict, including its causes, effects, and potential solutions. The



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objective is to revise and broaden the content of Brinkert's (2010) work, which is highly recommended for scholars who are interested in studying nursing conflict. Additionally, for a thorough examination of conflict research in healthcare, Kim et al. (2017) is also suggested. This review provides a comprehensive overview of conflict in organizational communication studies, including the latest social scientific theories in the field. Its aim is to provide a strong conceptual framework for conflict research in nursing. Many nursing conflict researchers fail to recognize the value of the social science literature on conflict management.

Therefore, a significant amount of effort is dedicated to asking repetitive questions. The progress of nursing research on conflict might be significantly accelerated by leveraging social science findings instead of repeating them, via the formulation of more complex inquiries that provide more valuable outcomes. For instance, a significant amount of attention and effort is dedicated to recording findings that might be inferred as inferences from the extensive body of conflict literature. The perpetual internal conflict within nursing units is a recurring phenomenon (Guerra, Prochnow, Trevizan, & Guido, 2011) saw a study that linked poor communication to conflict, as stated by Kaitelidou et al. (2012).

Nurses have expressed frustration with recurring conflicts, according to Edwards, Thronson, and Girardin (2012). Nurse managers would benefit from education on appropriate conflict management, as highlighted by Guerra et al. (2011) and Vivar (2006). Effective conflict management relies on good communication, as emphasized by Edwards et al. (2012) and Kaitelidou et al. (2012). Poor conflict management, particularly when it leads to disruptive behaviors, can cause stress and low job satisfaction, as indicated by Stecker and Stecker (2014). Thoroughly researched social science is based on these underlying assumptions, which serve as the beginning point rather than the endpoint.

Scholars from the nursing and communication disciplines are interested in studying workplace conflict. However, communication has a longer and more advanced theoretical background compared to nursing. However, the majority of communication scholars possess just a basic awareness of clinical circumstances. While communication academics possess a comprehensive knowledge of conflict, they lack the nuanced comprehension of the nursing workplace that nurse researchers possess. This hinders their ability to effectively apply communication and conflict literature to the clinical situation, which has its own distinct dynamics. Although there is a vast amount of literature on communication in organizational conflict, there is a scarcity of research specifically focused on the healthcare setting.

Nurse researchers possess a strong understanding of the intricate clinical environment, however their knowledge of social science theory is not as advanced. By the 1970s, communication scholars had already established the belief that conflict is both unavoidable and beneficial. However, in the field of nursing, the idea that well-managed conflicts can lead to improved performance has only recently gained popularity, as evidenced by studies such as Greer, Saygi, Aaldering, & de Dreu (2012).

Communication and nursing scholars might get valuable insights from each other on conflict in this unique professional environment. A communication viewpoint places emphasis on the interacting dynamics of human communication and provides a comprehensive and well-established collection of theories on conflict in organizational contexts. From a nursing standpoint, the focus is on understanding the dynamics of a clinical environment. Social scientists have acknowledged that this kind of organizational setting is very distinct and may not align directly with existing organizational theory and research (Ramanujam & Rousseau, 2006).

2. The perspective from the field of nursing

Conflict is described in the nursing literature as a characteristic of the working environment (Cao et al., 2016; Erickson et al., 2004). Nurse managers consider conflict in practical circumstances to be a significant cause of ethical issues (Aitamaa, Leino-Kilpi, Iltanen, & Suhonen, 2016). Nursing practitioners often face ongoing difficulties that complicate the job and make it more prone to conflict. These obstacles include factors such as financial limitations, safety issues, conflicts in roles, and excessive workloads. Nurses often encounter conflict in the dynamic and unpredictable nursing environment, which may arise from interactions with colleagues, doctors, other professionals, and patients. However, despite the nursing literature portraying this issue as being influenced by the environment, it characterizes the remedy as being dependent on human abilities. Conflict management abilities are often considered a crucial aspect of nursing expertise (Quierós, 2015). While communication with patients is given priority, communication among nurses is often overlooked.

In the nursing literature, inadequate conflict management has been associated with stress (Borteyrou, Trucho & Rasche, 2014; Galdikienė, Asikainen, Balčiūnas, & Suominen, 2014; Naholi, Nosek, & Somayaji, 2015) and burnout (Gascon et al., 2013). On the other hand, effective conflict management has been demonstrated to enhance both decision-making (Ek & Svedlund, 2015) and patient care (Steinmo et al., 2016). Professional publications extensively discuss the significance of effective conflict management (Greer et al., 2012; Hocking, 2006; Okoli, 2010; Trossman, 2011; Savel & Munro, 2015). However, the positive aspects of conflict have only recently been widely recognized. Although collaborative conflict management abilities have significance, they constitute just a fraction of the whole answer. Developing positive individual, group, and organizational perspectives on conflict is very important.

3. The Communication Perspective

The communication literature portrays conflict as an inherent and purposeful human activity. Communication scientists posit the inherent possibility for disagreement to be productive. A highly referenced source in the topic is the publication by Folger, Poole, and Stutman (2012). Initially released in 1984, its clever use of double entendre to convey conflict quickly gained widespread acceptance. Organizational members use communication to address problems and also achieve goals by means of conflict. Conflict is a crucial means by which work is achieved. Initially, communication scholars and other social scientists saw conflict as an inherently

detrimental influence. Therefore, the emphasis was placed on conflict resolution as the preferred result. In the 1960s, conflict assumed a constructive and beneficial nature. Subsequently, conflict was seen as advantageous and necessary (Mathur & Sayeed, 1983) and beneficial to the objectives of the organization (Mathur & Sayeed, 1983; Rahim, 1983, 1985).

Conflict fosters unity (Coser, 1956), maintains power equilibrium (Blake, Shepard, & Mouton, 1964), accelerates transformation (Litterer, 1966), and stimulates innovative problem-solving (Hall, 1969, 1973, 1986). The attention on conflict management was redirected by these assumptions. Within the realm of contemporary communication study, the phrase "conflict resolution" is specifically used to refer to the examination and analysis of significant conflicts, such as those encountered in union negotiations. This use has been consistent for many decades. Within the nursing literature, the shift from emphasizing conflict resolution to conflict management has just lately started, and the two concepts are still mostly seen as equivalent.

4. Research on communication in nursing conflict

There has been a scarcity of scholarly research on communication conflicts within the HCO framework. This section reviews any research undertaken by a communication scholar, regardless of whether it is published in a nursing journal. Many nursing publications are the result of cooperation between communication and nursing academics. Existing research based on communication theory provide a viable basis for fostering more collaboration between academics in nursing and communication. There is a scarcity of communication research about conflict in the field of nursing. Communication academics primarily focus on studying healthcare organizations (HCOs) and medical staff in a broader sense. This encompasses all aspects of nurse communication.

In their study, Marin et al. (1994) investigated how nurses react to circumstances when interpersonal conflict arises due to their conflicting professional obligations to both patients and doctors. When a physician requests that certain information be kept from the patient, but the nurse's professional ethics prevent her from doing so, Marin et al. found that the nurse's perception of her role as a professional is the main factor influencing her choice of conflict management style. This research rigorously delineates situational restrictions and thoroughly contextualizes the nature of the interaction, unveiling a comprehensive perspective on the contextual factors that impact the choice of conflict style. The dual-concern approach is used to conceptualize and measure conflict style. However, there has been a significant change in thinking regarding the role of conflict style. Traditionally, conflict style was seen as an independent variable, meaning it was considered a cause rather than a result. Marin et al. (1994) see conflict style as a distinct result.

Structurational divergence theory (SDT) was formulated by a group of researchers consisting of communication and nursing academics (Nicotera & Clinkscales, 2010; Nicotera & Mahon, 2013; Nicotera, Mahon, & Wright, 2014; Nicotera, Mahon, & Zhao, 2010; Nicotera, Zhao, Mahon, Kim, & Conway-Morana, 2015). SDT elucidates the manner in which institutionalized

inconsistencies contribute to ineffective communication and serve as the fundamental cause of repetitive cycles of conflict. Structuration is a sociological concept that describes the complex processes by which individuals use cultural and societal norms and resources to comprehend and behave correctly in social contexts (Giddens, 1984).

Divergence is the meeting point of several sets of institutionalized norms and resources that are in competition with each other, below the level of people's consciousness. Due to the presence of contradictory meaning structures, communication issues become deeply rooted in HCOs. For instance, a nurse may feel obligated by bureaucratic systems to preserve her unit's Magnet designation. However, the need for providing treatment at the patient's bedside coincides with the equally strong need to complete Magnet paperwork, causing the individual to feel unproductive and leading to interpersonal confrontations with their management and colleagues over priorities (Nicotera et al., 2014).

Moreland and Apker (2016) analyze workplace conflict in the nursing field by adopting an organizational communication viewpoint and using a case study methodology. As a component of a broader investigation, the researchers examined the reactions of 135 nurses who were asked to express their thoughts on their "identity, communication practices, and conflict experiences as a nurse" (p. 817). The authors conduct a thorough investigation that examines the experience of conflict and communication, as well as how nurses handle conflict and stress. The researchers determine that exclusionary communication, which includes nonparticipatory and unsupportive messages, significantly contributes to conflict and stress. Unsurprisingly, respect was shown to be a significant notion, as nurses' handling and mishandling of conflict were influenced by both respectful and disrespectful communication. The instances demonstrated that cultivating respectful corporate cultures is crucial for effectively using conflict for positive goals, such as fostering creativity and facilitating vital decision-making, while simultaneously averting adverse consequences.

5. Conclusion

Nurse researchers and communication scholars have the potential to develop a more advanced approach to nursing conflict by collaborating and sharing knowledge with each other. This collaborative effort may surpass the achievements of each field of literature alone. The corpus of work produced by nurse researchers is context-sensitive and may assist communication scholars in addressing the distinct characteristics of healthcare organizations, as well as the specific aspects of the nursing working environment. Simultaneously, the belief in communication that conflict is inherent has already started to influence the underlying assumptions in nursing research. However, it is important for both academic groups to pay attention to the professional value system that has historically seen dispute as dishonorable. It is essential to advocate for a healthier perspective on conflict and to make more refined differentiations between problems, tasks, emotions, and behavior.

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