

Conflict Management in Semiconductor Companies

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This paper is a preliminary study on conflict management practices in the semiconductor industry. The study aimed to survey and describe what conflict management practices are being applied in the semiconductor industry, and to get a sense of what companies, particularly human resource managers, mean when they talk of conflict management practices. Heads of different human resource departments were interviewed for this purpose. The results show that most of the efforts at conflict management take the form of relationship-building and prevention of dysfunctional conflict. On the other hand, functional conflict is facilitated through creative and structured communication mechanisms. Specific conflict resolution mechanisms or approaches were not presented by the respondents. This may be due to the variety of conflict resolution approaches as well as the types, and sources of conflict that arise in these organizations. The results were discussed in relation to different conceptual approaches, namely of Walton (1987), Bisno (1988) and Brown (1983).

From the period 1988-1990 (1986-1987 were extreme years), around 200 strikes a year occurred, involving tens of thousands of employees and more than a million man-days lost (BLR-DOLE, 1988, 1990).

What are the implications of such industrial conflict on the country? Assuming that (1) the average wage of the striking employees during that period was 100 pesos a day, and (2) that labor cost comprises 10% of revenues, the cumulative loss of revenue in that three year period is an estimated 40 billion pesos. Sad to say, there is no documentation as to the actual losses incurred from such strike. Worse, beyond this estimated loss, it has to be recognized that some companies ceased operations as a result of labor problems, thus increasing unemployment and denting the attractiveness of conducting business in the Philippines.

Looking at the data in another way, assuming that in the given three year reported period (1988-1990), no union went on strike twice, then compared to the number of unions registered at that time, there was a one in six or 15% possibility of a unionized organization experiencing a strike in a three year period.

Naturally, as the Philippines aims towards Philippines 2000 and becoming a new economic tiger in the region, the business community has constantly cited industrial peace as a major area of concern. Likewise, the government, through the Department of Labor, has been taking measures to promote industrial peace.

Since then, it seems that strikes have markedly decreased. To some extent, this may be attributed to better regulation, mediation and arbitration. Or, it may be that unions have tempered their responses in the light of the implications of such strikes on their constituents, the companies they are working with, and on the economy. Lastly, employers themselves may have taken note, become enlightened and exerted effort on addressing employee concerns and managing conflict.

Beyond legislation and DOLE regulations, industrial peace naturally should prevail at the organizational level. Along this line, conflict is not

viewed in a negative sense, since conflict is the tension that pushes progress. However, what is critical is how conflict is managed. Thus, it becomes of interest now to determine how organizations manage conflict to maintain industrial peace.

Objectives, Scope and Limitations

This paper is a preliminary study on conflict management practices in Philippine corporations. As a preliminary study, inquiry on this topic is limited to the semiconductor industry. The semiconductor industry was chosen in view of the relative accessibility of data to the researcher. Its profile, however, would show that this is an industry worth studying, because of its size, contribution to the economy, and because it is a young and growing industry.

The main objective of this study is to survey and describe what conflict management practices are being applied in the semiconductor industry. Corollary to this objective, is to gather a sense of what companies, particularly human resource managers, mean when they talk of "conflict management practices."

As an initial study, this paper will not attempt to fully evaluate what the most effective practices are, since many other factors would have to be considered in such an evaluation. While it may be touched, this paper does not primarily aim to determine trends or common practices. Rather, the aim is to point out the diversity and range of practices for the application of other corporations and businesses in other industries.

Respondents were heads of human resource departments. Thus, the orientation may have an "HR" bias. The issue may be viewed entirely differently by employees or by the line managers.

Lastly, as with any research effort, this paper aims to compare the literature against the practices gathered and analyze parallelisms or points of divergence.

Profile of the Semiconductor Industry

The researcher surveyed organizations in the semiconductor industry. The semiconductor industry contributes to at least 25% annually (around US\$1.75 billion) of the country's total export sales. In the past years, this has been steadily increasing. The industry currently employs around 60,000 employees and has posted an annual 17 per cent growth rate in employment since 1986. The employment trend this year is expected to increase by 20%. Composed of Filipino-owned corporations and multinational corporations with direct links to their parent companies, most of companies are among the top 500 corporations of the Philippines and have established "world-class" facilities and reputations in the world market.

Semiconductors are generally labor-intensive, although the more progressive facilities are highly automated. The work force per company ranging from 100 to 4000. Of the work force, generally 70-80% are females.

Only a handful of the companies are unionized. Large companies that had unionized, such as Signetics Filipinas, Stanford Microsystems, Dynetics, Integrated Circuits, Complex Electronics, Semiconductor Devices Philippines, DynaCraft, Raytheon, Encore Filipinas, and Asionics closed down and transferred to other Asian companies due to labor problems. In all, an estimated 1,0,000 have been displaced due to labor problems.

A handful among these companies (there are around 35 companies, 10 to 15 of which are large corporations) have been nominated to the Personnel Management Association of the Philippines Employer of the Year Award. Some have been nominated or earned other awards: PMAP's Outstanding Personnel Program or the Sikap-Gawa award (on labor-management cooperation). Some of the Human Resource Managers of these companies have been nominated as PMAP Outstanding Personnel Manager of the year. The industry boasts of two awardees to this last award category in the PMAP awards' 13 years. At least twice a year, PMAP's Learning Sessions features a human resource program or

experience by a company in this industry. In engineering and management, the industry leaders are benchmark leaders for manufacturers even beyond the industry.

Given the ease by which these companies can easily transfer its operations at any sign of industrial unrest, effective employee relations are key to the continued operations in the Philippines. The management awards some companies in the industry have garnered, as well as experiences it has shared to management, engineering and human resource practitioners clearly point out that this industry is worth studying. Because of its vital role in the economy and in employment, as well as its relative success (for those companies that have remained), the lessons that could be gleaned could be expected to help other companies and practitioners.

Method

To gather data on how corporations managed conflict, a focus group discussion was conducted. Since the group consisted of representatives of only five companies, survey interviews were also conducted. Data were gathered from the heads of the human resource departments or employee relations. As mentioned, since the objective of this study was to look at the practices in place, only those who were charged with this responsibility (that is the human resource practitioner) were interviewed. In later studies perhaps, when one would want to evaluate the effectiveness of such practices, data would also have to be gathered from employee groups.

Being a preliminary study, the researcher just used two very general questions. A particular conceptual framework was avoided, since there was the disinclination on the part of the researcher to limit the study immediately by focusing on a specific framework. Oftentimes, a research effort attempts to superimpose a specific framework on the study, and the questions are constructed to lead to the validation or invalidation of the framework.

In keeping with the generalist, exploratory approach, conflict management was not defined to the respondents. In so doing, the researcher hopes to glean the human resource managers' view on what comprises conflict management.

Relevance of the study

This study hopes to help the union leader, human resource/ organizational development practitioner, entrepreneur, manager, government agency worker, practicing industrial/ organizational psychologist or academician to better understand conflict management in the Philippines. By surveying what conflict management practices are being applied, the reader would gain insights and suggestions on how conflict could better be managed in organizations, and how conflict management can be operationalized in her own organization. The concerned individual could test the efficacy of the conflict management practices in his own situation and develop a deeper awareness on conflict management.

Considering the profile of the respondent companies, the practices being applied would provide helpful insights to the new business enterprise, which may be subject to intense competition and cannot afford industrial unrest.

Lastly, being a preliminary study in the area of conflict management in Philippine business, it is hoped that this would encourage the practitioner or researcher to further explore, test, evaluate, and discover the various conflict management approaches that would promote organizational and individual effectiveness and growth.

Some Conceptual Approaches

Quite a number of books on human resource management and industrial relations focus on forms conflict resolution which are negotiations, mediation, arbitration, grievance machinery or collective

bargaining (e.g., Barbash, 1980; Chruden & Sherman, 1984; DuBrin, 1990). The researcher found this rather disconcerting because there seemed to be much more than these in the arena of employee relations in the Philippines.

A closer look at publications concentrating on conflict management provides interesting detail and depth. A diversity in approach and coverage is revealed. Some perspectives on conflict management which struck the writer are presented in greater detail in this section. These were chosen because the focus was primarily on conflict management in organizations and the concepts presented focus on the range of conflict management rather than a specific segment (there are numerous publications that focus only on a specific topic of conflict management). The following perspectives are provided to detail the breadth of perspectives on the area of conflict management.

Interpersonal Dialogue And Third Party Role. Walton (1987) looks at conflict management as having different goals: resolution or control. Since conflict that is controlled may eventually manifest itself in a more dysfunctional manner, resolution of conflict is the preferred goal.

The appropriateness of different approaches to conflict management depends on the nature of the conflict. Three basically different processes are involved in the interaction between conflicting parties: bargaining, problem solving and relationship structuring.

On the other hand, two relevant conflict management processes are interpersonal dialogue and third-party roles. Dialogue and third-party facilitation of the dialogue become appropriate when there is a need to improve the quality of the future relationship or at least to enable the parties to deal with shared problems. When the key process is bargaining or bargaining combined with problem-solving, then mediator becomes the relevant third-party role. Mediation may need to generate a change in relations in order to obtain a resolution of the dispute on hand. The dialogue approach to improving a relationship may need the resolution of some substantive dispute at the heart of the deteriorated relationship.

The basic premise in improving relationships is that the quality of the relationship is a determinant of the performance of the parties to the relationship and the ability to handle future differences. It is for this reason that specific issues may have secondary emphasis in the management of conflict. These are conditions assumed to exist in organizations where relationships are vital to the success of the organization.

However, it should be recognized that in other conflict situations, the quality relationship of the parties involved is not critical. In such cases, other methods and processes may apply.

Managing Conflict at Organizational Interfaces. Brown (1983) defines organizational interfaces as "the meeting grounds where social units come face to face and parties interact." These social units may be organizations, groups, departments, and their interaction may be continuing, well-established or brief and occasional.

Focus interfaces draws attention to several aspects of organizational behavior that are often ignore. There is focus on the (1) linkage between parties, rather than on the parties themselves, (2) evolution over time of linkages rather than a single static picture of the relations, (3) forces for interface integration and disintegration.

Analyzing and managing conflict at organizational interfaces is important because of the trends towards (1) organizational size and complexity, (2) increasing interdependence, (3) rapid social and technological change, and (4) interface vulnerability to conflict.

The types of interfaces are:

1. *Department interface:* the interface bringing together subunits that need each other to achieve organizational goals,

2. *Level interface*: the interface that brings together parties with different ranks in the organizational hierarchy,

3. *Culture Interface*: brings together people defined as different within a shared culture,

4. *Organization interface*: brings together organizations whose goals and assumptions may be very diverse, though they depend on each other for critical information or resources, and

5. *Complex interface*: where several simple interfaces operate together.

Four general strategies for intervening in interface conflict are considered:

1. Redirecting immediate behavior,
2. Reallocating resources relevant to the problem,
3. Reframing perspectives on the situation, and
4. Realigning underlying forces that affect interface events.

Categories of Conflict Interactions and Modes of Conflict Management. Bisno (1988) presents conflict management in terms of the sources of conflict, by categories of conflict interactions and modes, strategies and tactics of conflict management and how these interrelate.

Strategy, as used here, refers to an operational plan to achieve a conflict goal. A *tactic* is a specific implementing behavior that frequently involves the mobilizing and exercise of influence or power in relation to another party in a conflict situation.

Table 1 list the interventions for each of the strategies based on the assessed degree of conflict.

Intervention	For Too Much Conflict	Too Little Conflict
For redirecting behavior		
Control issues	Break up issues into smaller sized (smaller parties, smaller problems, set aside principles)	Consolidate issues to enlarge (Larger parties, larger problems, set procedural precedents, set substantive precedents)
Refocus alternative	Create alternatives that unfreeze deadlocks and revise commitments	Clarify hard choices and trade-off's in non-controversial alternatives
Alter communication	Increase believable communications Build mechanisms that ensure trustworthy information exchange Guard against within-party distortions of information Discuss escalation impacts on information flows	Raise suppressed or avoided issues Encourage investigation and discussion of potential problems Focus attention on lost or ignored information Discuss withdrawal and suppression impacts on communication
Change tactics	Initial presentations that permit cooperation; concessions as evidence of peaceful intent Conflict-resolution initiatives: minimize risks, clear intentions Self-defense tactics against escalation	Initial presentations that encourage examining differences, clear positions and demands Conflict-promoting initiatives: minimize risks, identify issues Self-defense tactics for withdrawal/suppression
For reallocating resources		
Alter resource interdependence	Expand resources to reduce conflict over scarcity Diversify resources to reduce interdependence	Contract resources to emphasize conflicting interests Consolidate resources to intensify interdependence

Intervention	For Too Much Conflict	Too Little Conflict
Alter management resources	<p>Increase resources from primary parties</p> <p>Refer disputes up the hierarchy for resolution</p> <p>Third-party resources: enforcers, researchers, consultants, mediators</p>	<p>Increase resources from primary parties</p> <p>Increase resources from primary parties</p> <p>Attract hierarchical attention to lack of conflict</p> <p>Third-party resources: activists, advocates, researchers, consultants, mediators</p>
For reframing perspectives		
Reformulate party interests	<p>Clarify and encourage work for superordinate goals</p>	<p>Clarify and encourage work for diversity of interests</p>
Revise unrealistic stereotypes	<p>Reduce unrealistic stereotypes of opponents/villainy</p> <p>Reduce unrealistic stereotypes of own innocence and victimization</p>	<p>Reduce unrealistic stereotypes of opponent's similarity or dangerousness</p> <p>Reduce unrealistic stereotypes of own similarity or inability to confront</p>
Reconceptualize the situation	<p>Construct theories that include both perspectives</p> <p>Clarify forces operating to promote conflict</p>	<p>Construct theories that differentiate perspectives</p> <p>Clarify forces operating to reduce conflict</p>
Recognize the conflict dynamics	<p>Understand escalatory interaction of perceptions, communications, and tactics</p>	<p>Understand withdrawal, suppression interaction of perceptions, communications, and tactics</p>
For realigning underlying forces		
Redefine unit boundaries	<p>Create new interface to manage conflict</p> <p>Include new parties</p>	<p>Deemphasize to reduce suppression or clarify boundaries to prevent avoidance</p> <p>Include assertive representatives or consultants</p>

Intervention	For Too Much Conflict	Too Little Conflict
Alter boundary permeability	<p>Define parties to cope with conflict or to reduce interdependence</p> <p>Open boundaries to new information and personnel rotation</p> <p>Close interface to escalatory inputs, provocative outputs</p>	<p>Define parties to reduce overlap or distance</p> <p>Close party boundaries to establish differences or open party boundaries to stimulate information</p> <p>Open interface to stimulating inputs, ventilating outputs or close interface to disruptive inputs, outputs that drain critical resources</p>
Revise formal rules and procedures	<p>Define rules and procedures legitimate to both parties</p>	<p>Loosen overly detailed rules and procedures that suppress debate or tighten rules and procedures that permit withdrawal</p>
Renegotiate shared norms and values	<p>Negotiate shared standards of appropriate behavior and dirty tactics</p>	<p>Loosen shared standards that restrict debate (in cases of suppression) or negotiate shared standards and values that support debate (in cases of withdrawal)</p>
Refocus incentives	<p>Clarify incentives for reduced conflict</p> <p>Emphasize costs of continued conflict</p>	<p>Clarify incentives for more debate</p> <p>Clarity costs of continued suppression or withdrawal</p>

The categories of conflict interactions are:

1. Interpersonal: one on one;
2. Interpersonal: representational, wherein an individual enters into the conflict management process on behalf of a group;
3. Interpersonal: third-party interventions, where a service individual provides help in the management of conflict through mediation, conciliation, or as an ombudsman.

The modes of conflict management, criteria for use, strategies and related tactics are described in the Table 2.

Table 2. Modes of Conflict Management.

Mode	Criteria for Use	Strategies	Tactics
Forestalling and sidestepping	Conflict is unnecessary, inappropriate, or the costs would be too high	Prevention Avoidance	Increased organizational responsiveness Early identification of latent conflicts "Hotlines" Use of institutionalized dissenters Exposure of differences prior to becoming conflicts Diffusion of conflict managing skills Denial Flight Relinquishment Suspension
Generating conflict	Nonconflictual means are ineffectual; power/influence resources are available; and the costs of conflict would not be unacceptably high	Explicating latent conflicts and identifying areas in which conflictual actions would be desirable Creating conflict managing capabilities	Consciousness raising Exposing false consensus Providing opportunities for the articulation of significant differences
Conflict management by covert means	Inability or lack of desire to cope with over conflict Inability to get the other	Passive resistance or concealment Manipulation	Negativism Non-compliance Stonewalling Deceit Disadvantaging

Mode	Criteria for Use	Strategies	Tactics
Conflict management by emergent agreement	contender to engage in overt rule-structured conflict management Lack of power parity exposes vulnerable contender to excessive risks/ costs if over conflict management in used	Coactive disputation	Seduction Emotional extortion Divide and conquer
	One or more of the contenders is accessible to influence by the other(s) or the introduction of new objective data Both contenders are willing to engage in a search for better solutions Situation is not defined as one of sharply opposed vital interests or cherished commitments Anticipation that this mode will lead to more satisfactory outcome, with fewer costs, than other options		Joint problem solving Fact finding Gentle persuasion Consensual decision making

Mode	Criteria for Use	Strategies	Tactics
Conflict management by directly negotiated agreement	<p>Both contenders believe their objectives may best be gained by a negotiated mutual benefit agreement or a give-and-take solution</p> <p>The absence of extreme disparities in the balance of power between the contenders' willingness to negotiate may be subsequent to the preliminary or costly/ inconclusive use of other modes</p>	<p>Negotiation (Substrategies: integrative and distributive)</p>	<p>Definition of issues</p> <p>Focusing on interests</p> <p>Use "objective" criteria (negotiating on merit)</p> <p>Inventing mutually beneficial options</p> <p>Bargaining sub tactics: give and take (concessional exchange)</p> <p>carrot and stick debate</p>
Conflict management by indirect or procedural means	<p>Inability or lack of desire on the part of the contenders to reach an agreement through direct transactions</p> <p>Dissatisfaction with the results obtained from other modes of conflict management, or with prior decisions</p> <p>A willingness or requirement to submit conflictual</p>	<p>Use of third parties</p> <p>Use of "quasi-judicial" and judicial structures</p> <p>Use of formalized decision making procedures</p>	<p>Mediation</p> <p>Teaching conflict management competencies</p> <p>Use of consultant</p> <p>Use of an ombudsman</p> <p>Use of quasi-judicial and judicial appeals structures</p> <p>Voting</p>

Mode	Criteria for Use	Strategies	Tactics
Conflict management by exercise of authority or power	issues to indirect mechanisms or procedural resolution Inability or lack of desire on the part of a contender with positional power to use other conflict managing modes	Autoritative decision making Exercise of superior power	Persuasion Bargaining Force majeure Enforcing rules Setting limits "Pocket veto" Industrial actions (e.g. boycott or strike)

Conflict Management Practices/Mechanisms In the Semiconductor Industry

From the group discussions and interviews, the consolidated listing of conflict management practices cited by the different Human Resource Managers in the semiconductor industry are:

Open Door Policy. Some of the surveyed companies have a clearly articulated "open door policy." This means that an employee should feel free to talk to his supervisor about any work-related problem without fear of reprisal. An employee would also be welcome to raise his problem to any person/s of authority whom he feels could best address the problem (the higher manager, top management, the HR or Finance manager, the safety manager, etc.). The employee may raise the same problem to different parties (normally going up the organizational hierarchy or to the human resource department) if he is not satisfied with the outcome. Some policies commit to resolve the concern within a specific time period (a day or a week).

Write to Know. One company commits to respond to any employee's concern or question that is written and signed. (Personally raised questions are of course accepted.) The letter is posted on a designated bulletin board with the corresponding answer from the appropriate unit. This is administered by the employee relations unit within the human resource department.

Dialogue or One-on-one. The one-on-one is a periodic discussion between a supervisor and an employee. It is not a performance management discussion, but is conducted primarily to give the employee "air time." Summary of the discussion is prepared by the supervisor and confirmed by the employee. Discussions and action items are monitored by the human resource department. A modification of this is an informal discussion with the supervisor on the employee's birthday over lunch.

Group dialogue or Speak Up sessions. Commonly known as speak-up sessions, this is either a small or large group meeting with one or two representatives of top management. Normally the President or General Manager presides. He may be accompanied by the human resource manager and/or the operations manager. In this gathering, employees are given the opportunity to ask questions or air their concerns. Some companies conduct this periodically (every six months) while others conduct it when there is a major issue that is ongoing (either formally or through the grapevine). It is interesting to note that despite the relative large size of the companies (in the hundreds to the thousands), the President, who is sometimes an expatriate, is very much involved in these activities.

Some companies have ground rules. For example, to avoid expectations and a touchy subject, some companies prefer not to discuss economic issues, perhaps implying that these are management prerogative and highly dependent on company performance. Or, in order not to bypass or weaken the authority of supervisors, one company set as its rule that only problems that the immediate supervisor *cannot resolve or has failed to resolve* may be discussed. If it has not yet been raised to the supervisor,

then the management representative will not entertain the question or concern.

Another ground rule applied by one company is: speak only for yourself, do not ask questions for someone else. This rule was established to encourage each one to speak up rather than have the assertive or courageous few raise the concerns of the timid majority. To facilitate this, in small groups, everyone must speak up at least once.

A variation of this are "General Assembly Meetings" wherein the President or senior manager addresses a large group. These meetings tend to be more informational or clarificatory. Because of the size of the group, only a few questions are entertained.

Another variation are small gatherings (e.g., over lunch) or small group discussions with the President or human resource manager. Employees may be randomly select, selected (e.g., some five-year service employees, some participants from a training program, birthday celebrants of the month, supervisors, technicians or engineers, etc.) or assigned.

In a unionized firm, the union leaders regularly met with the General Manager to discuss problems, potential changes, grievances, and other topics of concern.

Most of these sessions are minuted, posted on the bulletin board, and have management's commitment to resolve the issues within a specified period.

Labor-management Council or Service Committees. A labor-management council (LMC) is a group of employees and managers representing their unit or hierarchical level that sit down periodically to discuss issues of common concern. Employee representatives may either be elected or appointed. Where there is a union, it is normally the union leaders that sit in the council.

Another form of the LMC are the various committees where employees actively participate: Recreation Council, Bus Service Committee, Canteen Committee, Safety and Housekeeping committee. These are regarded by human resource managers as a manner of conflict resolution in the sense that the activities handled by these committees have a large hygiene impact (with reference to Herzberg's hygiene-motivator theory) on the employees. If not enough consultation is applied, or not enough employee participation is garnered, employee dissatisfaction may set in due to inappropriate hygiene programs implemented.

Appeal System. In some of the companies, a formal appeal system is in place. An employee who wishes to appeal a disciplinary action decision of his supervisor should forward his appeal to the next higher superior. The appeal moves up the hierarchy, to the human resource department up to the President.

For other companies, the Open Door Policy suffices as the appeal system. In one particular company, the human resource manager acts as an ombudsman. Being among the pioneer employees of the company, this manager is highly regarded and has a very paternal style. His decisions, which may overrule and discomfit the line superiors, hold sway and are respected in the interest of good employee-management relations. As such, this human resource manager is positioned in such a way that employees may run to him for assistance. If the decision of the supervisor is upheld, the concerned employee likewise receives some fatherly advice on dealing with the situation and preventing such problems to occur in the future. It is interesting to note that in this particular company, the ombudsman role of the human resource manager is so well-entrenched that the other practices cited above, are not applied in this company.

Informational Activities. Some of the respondents regard timely and accurate information given to employees as a form of conflict management. These come in the form of newsletters, company produced

videotaped newscasts, periodic informational meetings or briefings and bulletin board announcements. The premise here is that conflict that may arise due to lack of understanding or trust is reduced because employees are kept abreast of important events and information to the company.

Informal Network. Conflict is also managed through the informal network. Employees and managers use the informal channel (between an employee and her "padrino" or any manager she is comfortable with) to raise their concerns. Employee concerns may be intentionally or unintentionally be raised during informal chats or in social gatherings. The manager likewise uses these occasions to provide information, seek resolution or correct the problem afterwards.

Defined Set of Company Policies and Code of Conduct. Considered basic to managing conflict is a clear set of company policies and code of conduct. Conflict is believed to arise if expectations and sanctions for policy violation are not clear. While not all of the companies have defined all the policies and sanctions (for some, there is a philosophical aversion to listing and anticipating various forms of employee misbehaviors), the general belief is that "the clearer the policy, the better (for more consistent the implementation, and a higher sense of fairness).

Building Organizational Capability to Manage Conflict. An often overlooked but commonly practiced undertaking is the organization's efforts at building capability to manage conflict. Line managers and supervisors of most of the companies undergo a series of training on effective discipline, handling complaints and effective interpersonal relations. They are trained and exhorted to listen and accept feedback; not to react impulsively, to empathize with an employee's feelings, and to play fair. They undergo training to build negotiation skills, interpersonal effectiveness skills (Interaction Management, Zenger-Miffler, Seven Habits of Highly Effective People) and group facilitation skills.

Building effective interpersonal skills is not only confined to supervisors. Technical, professional and rank-and-file employees, in some companies, are likewise exposed to this type of training. Team building and team-empowerment are being practiced by a few. By building the skills and setting up structures to promote working together, conflict, once it surfaces is better managed because of a common understanding on the procedures and the need to effectively resolve conflict.

Findings and Analysis

As mentioned in earlier, the researcher was disappointed to note the books covering the broad topic "human resource management" or "industrial relations" focus only on conflict resolution, specifically on mediation, negotiation, arbitration or collective bargaining. These are approaches to managing conflict once the conflict has manifested itself. Moreover, these are approaches common to Western organized which are largely unionized. If these are reference books on management and industrial relations, such books are lacking in the breadth of conflict management approaches. Those described in these books are "reactive" rather than proactive. A practitioner in the field of human resource management, organizational development, industrial relations or management, may be misled to think that these are the only approaches to managing conflict.

Yet, the books and articles that concentrate on conflict management provide a refreshing perspective: from generating conflict, when there is not enough conflict, to dealing with a situation when there is too much conflict. Conflict may be managed based on the source of conflict, the type of conflict, the degree of conflict existing, the potential effects of the conflict or a combination of these factors.

Had this writer limited the conceptual research to the books on industrial relations and human resource management, a large gap between

what are the purported conflict management (resolution) processes and what is actually being practiced by business organizations would become evident.

However, with the treatises of Walton, Bisno and Brown, the approaches of semiconductor companies could be better appreciated. It would be noticed that a number of approaches are variants of dialogues. These are so because there is a recognition on the part of the companies (or management) that the relationships within the organization are important, thus efforts are taken to strengthen these through dialogues and other forms of communication.

The concern of the human resource managers was in identifying and resolving conflict. Many of the avenues described were those on generating a certain amount of conflict that would allow the issue to manifest itself, thereby allowing the matter to be resolved early on. Less emphasis was given on the various methods done to actually resolve the conflict issues. This may be attributed of course to the absence of any common framework that was presented to the respondents. Had this been presented, it is likely that interventions for redirecting behavior, reallocating resources, refraining perspectives and realigning underlying forces would clearly be illustrated from actual experiences in the companies studied.

With reference to Brown's interventions (see Table 1), most approaches described by the respondents were on *altering communication*. The open door policy, "write to know," dialogues (one-on-one or group), labor-management council are examples on "*raising suppressed or avoided issues*." Informational activities are illustrations of "*increasing believable communications*," "*building mechanisms that ensure trustworthy information exchange*" and "*guarding against within-party distortions of information*."

From Bisno's framework (see Table 2), the conflict management mode described is frequently that of "*forestalling and sidestepping*" or "*generating conflict*." By providing various conflict management

structures and avenues, the semiconductor companies were applying the strategies of "prevention", "explicating latent conflicts and identifying areas in which conflictual actions would be desirable" and "creating conflict managing capabilities." The tactics applied are "increasing organizational responsiveness," "early identification of latent conflict," "hot lines," "exposure of differences prior to becoming conflicts," "diffusion of conflict managing skills," "providing opportunities for the articulation of significant differences," "exposing a false consensus" and "consciousness-raising."

The informal network, the labor-management council or the formal appeal systems are examples of "conflict management by indirect or procedural means." Strategies thus applied are "use of third parties," (the "padrino system" is a clear example of this) or "use of formalized decision-making procedures."

A common theme in the prevention, conflict generating, or altering communication approaches is this: there should be no reprisal for airing a complaint or concern. Moreover, generating conflict must result in resolution, appropriate action and increased understanding for the management of conflict to be viable. It is also interesting to note, that some companies carefully avoid the term "complaint". The preferred term is "concern." The use of this word implies a common stake and consideration, whereas a complaint or grievance implies opposition and carries a negative affect.

Cooperation, team building and employee participation programs are viewed also as a conflict prevention/resolution/management approaches. The processes by which specific issues are addressed would then be illustration of "conflict management by emergent agreement" or "by directly negotiated agreement."

The rather detailed tables and approaches described in section 11 thus take on greater form when related to the conflict management practices and processes applied in private organizations.

Summary and Recommendations

This paper is a preliminary study on conflict management approaches that are practiced by industrial firms, namely semiconductor companies. A survey of the approaches reveals that most of the efforts of these companies are at relationship-building and prevention of dysfunctional conflict. On the other hand, functional conflict is facilitated through creative and structured communication mechanisms. Specific conflict resolution mechanisms or approaches were not presented by the respondents. This may be due to the variety of conflict resolution approaches as well as the types, and sources of conflict that arise in these organizations.

By relating the business practices to some conceptual approaches, namely of Walton, Bisno and Brown, these conceptual frameworks then become more meaningful and practical. While there was no aim to test the applicability of the selected conceptual approaches, all three, particularly the more detailed conflict management strategies or interventions presented by Bisno and Brown are very much appropriate and helpful.

It is regrettable however that these superior conceptual frameworks are not at all discussed or presented in general textbooks on human resource management, organizational behavior, industrial/organizational psychology or industrial relations. The comprehensiveness of the conceptual models expand the student's, researcher's or practitioner's view on conflict management.

Rather, the general textbooks focus on the more formal mechanisms as arbitration, mediation, negotiation and collective bargaining-, mechanisms which may not be all that helpful in Philippine corporations since these are mechanisms that are applied when the conflict has already increased in magnitude.

If the aim of the human resource/organizational development/ industrial-organizational psychology practitioner or student is the

effectively manage conflict, then the other options presented by Brown and Bisno are indeed worth studying. Likewise, the actual applications of the labor-intensive semiconductor companies serve as fitting benchmarks for study and evaluation to the practitioner.

In conclusion, it is recommended to the interested academician or practitioner that courses covering conflict and conflict management should also touch on the conceptual frameworks of Walton, Bisno, and Brown. Lastly, because there is a dearth of information on what conflict management approaches work and what does not, further evaluation and study, as well as propagation of the findings, would certainly contribute to organizational effectiveness, industrial peace, enlightened management, and national progress.

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