



Review Article

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Power Dynamics and Organizational Conflict: An Integrative Review of Power Theory and Conflict Management Approaches

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Abstract: Organizational conflict constitutes an inevitable and dynamic phenomenon arising from divergent interests, values, perceptions, and unequal access to resources within contemporary organizations. Alongside increasing organizational complexity, collaboration intensity, and performance demands, conflict has become deeply intertwined with power relations that shape decision making processes, interpersonal interactions, and organizational outcomes. This article aims to examine organizational conflict through an integrated lens of power theory and contemporary conflict management approaches, emphasizing how power utilization influences conflict dynamics and resolution effectiveness. Using an integrative literature review approach, this study synthesizes recent theoretical developments and empirical findings published primarily within the last five years to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between conflict and power in modern organizational contexts. The review reveals that conflict does not inherently produce negative consequences; rather, its outcomes depend largely on how power is exercised by organizational actors, particularly leaders. Cooperative and ethical uses of power, such as empowerment, participatory decision making, and transparent communication, tend to foster psychological safety, procedural justice, trust, and constructive task conflict that enhances learning, innovation, and performance. Conversely, coercive and unilateral power practices frequently intensify relationship conflict, resistance, and declining organizational commitment. Furthermore, the findings highlight the critical role of leadership in balancing formal authority and informal influence to channel conflict toward productive outcomes. This article contributes to organizational theory by integrating power and conflict perspectives into a unified analytical framework and offers practical insights for leaders and managers seeking to manage conflict strategically while promoting sustainable organizational effectiveness and healthy workplace relations.

Keywords: organizational conflict, power dynamics, conflict management, leadership, integrative literature review

1. Background

Organizational conflict represents an inherent characteristic of institutional life, emerging from the diverse interests, objectives,

perceptions, values and differential resource access that individuals and groups bring to the workplace. As organizational complexity intensifies alongside growing workforce diversity, heightened interaction intensity,

performance demands and adaptation requirements, the probability of conflict escalates correspondingly. Contemporary management scholarship conceptualizes conflict as arising when one party perceives that another party's actions obstruct their interests, values or objectives, whether through actual interference or perceptual interpretation (Mohamed et al., 2024; Kilag et al., 2024). Consequently, conflict transcends mere interpersonal discord, constituting instead an integral component of organizational structural and systemic dynamics that reflects institutional character and governance architecture.

Within this framework, conflict does not inherently possess destructive properties. Modern organizational perspectives emphasize that when managed appropriately, conflict functions as a corrective mechanism promoting reflection, organizational learning and innovation capacity. Recent empirical investigations demonstrate that moderate levels of task conflict enhance decision-making quality and team performance, particularly within work environments demanding creativity and complex problem resolution (Jumawan et al., 2024; Martins et al., 2020). Therefore, comprehensive conflict understanding constitutes an essential prerequisite enabling organizations to minimize adverse impacts whilst optimizing constructive potential.

Power represents an inseparable dimension of organizational conflict, as virtually all work interactions involve processes through which parties influence others' behaviour, attitudes and decisions. Contemporary organizational power conceptualization extends beyond formal authority structures to encompass informal sources including specialized expertise, professional legitimacy, social network positioning and strategic information control (Yukl & Gardner, 2020; Schermuly et al., 2025). Current research indicates that power distribution asymmetries can precipitate conflict manifesting as resistance, dissatisfaction or responses to decision-

making processes perceived as unjust (Alazmi, 2024; Burhan & Khan, 2024).

In modern organizations increasingly emphasizing collaboration, cross-functional integration and participatory leadership, the conflict-power nexus emerges as critically significant. Leaders' power utilization approaches—whether coercive, persuasive or collaborative—substantially determine whether conflict evolves into learning opportunities or instead undermines trust and organizational climate (Edelmann et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2023). Effective conflict management demands profound comprehension of power dynamics enabling conflict channelling towards constructive outcomes contributing to organizational effectiveness and sustainability. This article therefore aims to examine comprehensively contemporary conflict theories, power conceptualizations and conflict management approaches relevant across diverse organizational typologies.

Theories of Organizational Conflict: Contemporary Paradigms

Organizational conflict scholarship evolution reveals substantial paradigmatic transformation, progressing from classical repressive approaches towards modern adaptive and functional perspectives. Traditional viewpoints characterized conflict as dysfunctional phenomena requiring avoidance due to perceived threats to stability, working relationship integrity and productivity. This framework positioned managerial roles as focused upon conflict containment and suppression through hierarchical structures, formalized regulations and intensive supervision.

However, contemporary organizational dynamics characterized by rapid environmental change, uncertainty and innovation imperatives render such approaches inadequate. Interactionist and contingency perspectives regard conflict as inevitable and indeed necessary for maintaining organizational vitality.

Constructively managed conflict stimulates idea exchange, elevates decision quality and prevents organizations from succumbing to routines and groupthink (Mohamed et al., 2024; Omale et al., 2024). Consequently, conflict perception has transitioned from viewing it as eliminable threat towards recognizing it as organizational resource requiring strategic understanding, direction and management for enhancing effectiveness and competitive positioning.

Classification and Contemporary Theoretical Perspectives

Organizational conflict manifests across multiple analytical levels, extending from individual domains to inter-group and organizational systems. Contemporary management literature categorizes conflict into several principal forms—intrapersonal, interpersonal, inter-group and inter-organizational—demonstrating conflict's multidimensional and layered character. This approach aligns with contemporary perspectives emphasizing conflict as interaction outcomes between individual psychological factors and organizational structural conditions (Kilag et al., 2024; Martins et al., 2020).

Structural theory within organizational studies affirms that conflict frequently originates from power distribution asymmetries, strategic resource access inequities and formal role and status differentials. Such imbalances create conditions wherein less powerful groups or individuals tend to express resistance—overtly or covertly—against dominant party impositions. Contemporary research demonstrates that structural injustice perceptions and limited decision-making participation constitute primary predictors of destructive workplace conflict (Alazmi, 2024; Mohamed et al., 2024).

Within modern theoretical development, psychological safety has gained substantial attention as crucial framework for understanding cognitive conflict within teams. Psychologically safe work environments

enable team members to express divergent viewpoints, criticisms and alternative ideas without fearing interpersonal or professional consequences. Recent empirical evidence demonstrates that psychological safety functions as key mechanism transforming idea-based and knowledge-based conflict into collective learning processes, innovation and enhanced decision-making quality (Huerta et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2020).

Recent Empirical Evidence: Conflict and Organizational Effectiveness

Empirical research conducted during the past five years increasingly reinforces understanding that conflict's organizational effectiveness impact exhibits contingent properties. Recent meta-analyses confirm that relationship conflict consistently correlates negatively with performance, psychological wellbeing and job satisfaction. Conversely, task conflict can contribute positively towards decision quality and team performance when maintained at moderate levels and facilitated through effective communication mechanisms (Jumawan et al., 2024; Huerta et al., 2024).

Investigations of knowledge-based teams reveal that expertise and perspective diversity increases cognitive conflict potential. However, when supported by leadership promoting open dialogue and mutual respect, such conflict actually enriches viewpoint diversity and enhances solution accuracy (Hillberg Jarl, 2024; Wiese et al., 2022). Furthermore, cross-cultural studies demonstrate that leadership roles in creating trust climates and open communication prove crucial for mitigating interpersonal conflict's negative effects whilst strengthening team cohesion (Tumba, 2024; Mhlongo et al., 2024).

These findings indicate conflict represents not merely inevitable social phenomena but strategic instruments potentially leverageable for enhancing organizational effectiveness. Conflict outcomes depend fundamentally upon management quality, leadership styles

and psychological and structural contexts within which conflict unfolds.

Sources and Dynamics of Organizational Conflict

Organizational conflict emerges from diverse interconnected sources including divergent inter-unit objectives, high task interdependence, communication barriers, individual value and orientation differences, and performance pressures within increasingly competitive work environments. Contemporary literature conceptualizes conflict as dynamic processes developing gradually rather than events emerging suddenly. Understanding conflict stages enables organizations to implement earlier interventions before conflict becomes destructive (Nurjanah, 2022; Safi & Khairkhwa, 2024).

When conflict remains inadequately managed, consequences may include performance deterioration, coordination weakening, work-related stress intensification and interpersonal relationship damage. Conversely, conflict managed constructively through open communication, collaboration and problem-solving approaches demonstrably promotes innovation, strengthens trust and elevates organizational decision-making quality (Omale et al., 2024; Usendok et al., 2022).

2. Review Methodology

2.1 Search Strategy

This integrative review followed a systematic literature search conducted across multiple academic databases including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, Emerald Insight, and Taylor & Francis Online. Search terms combined included "organizational conflict" AND "power dynamics," "conflict management" AND "leadership power," "empowerment" AND "organizational conflict," and "psychological safety" AND "task conflict." The search was limited to peer-reviewed articles published between 2020-2025 to ensure contemporary relevance.

2.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria encompassed: (1) empirical or theoretical studies on organizational conflict and power dynamics; (2) publications in English; (3) peer-reviewed journal articles; and (4) studies focusing on workplace contexts. Exclusion criteria eliminated: (1) non-peer-reviewed sources; (2) studies prior to 2020; (3) non-organizational contexts; and (4) non-English publications. From 1,247 initial records, 156 full-text articles were assessed, resulting in 20 studies selected for synthesis following PRISMA guidelines.

2.3 Data Synthesis

Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns across power usage styles, conflict types, and organizational outcomes. Studies were categorized by theoretical framework (power theory, conflict management), empirical findings, and practical implications.

Recent research additionally confirms that cooperative conflict resolution styles oriented towards mutual interests contribute significantly to team member participation, social cohesion and innovation capacity, particularly within organizations featuring complex task structures and knowledge-based operations (Mohamed et al., 2024; Martins et al., 2020). Thus, whilst conflict proves unavoidable, its consequences depend fundamentally upon organizational recognition of conflict sources and channelling towards productive directions.

Power Theory in Modern Organizations

Power studies within modern organizations reveal transition from understanding based solely upon formal authority towards broader, more contextual approaches. Power is conceptualized as individual or group capacities for influencing decisions, behaviour and resource allocation through various mechanisms including specialized expertise, information control, social networks and symbolic legitimacy. Contemporary research confirms that individual positioning within social and

internal communication networks constitutes important determinants of influence levels and power (Alazmi, 2024; Yukl & Gardner, 2020).

Organizational politics perspectives additionally emphasize that organizations function as interest arenas wherein actors construct coalitions, negotiate legitimacy and influence strategic decisions for maintaining or expanding influence. Recent empirical studies indicate power possesses ambivalent consequences: whilst enhancing control sensations and leadership effectiveness, it potentially generates cognitive biases and dominating behaviour when unbalanced by accountability and ethical norms (Burhan & Khan, 2024; Wang et al., 2023).

Research conducted over the past five years consistently demonstrates that ethical and participatory power utilization by leaders contributes towards increased trust, working relationship quality and organizational commitment. Conversely, coercive and exclusive power usage tends to trigger latent conflict, resistance and declining employee engagement (Edelmann et al., 2020; Schermuly et al., 2025). Accordingly, power functions not merely as control instrument but also as strategic mechanism shaping social and political dynamics and overall organizational effectiveness.

Models of Power Distribution

Organizational power distribution reflects how authority, control and decision-making processes are allocated within work structures, whether centralized or decentralized. Classical bureaucratic perspectives view power as formal authority legitimized through rules and hierarchy, whereby decision flows exhibit vertical and rigid characteristics. However, contemporary organizational studies demonstrate that excessive power concentration potentially reduces flexibility, responsiveness and employee participation, particularly within work environments demanding rapid adaptation and continuous

innovation (Yukl & Gardner, 2020; Schermuly et al., 2025).

Responding to these limitations, modern approaches emphasize empowerment as more participatory and humanistic power distribution mechanisms. Empowerment encompasses not merely structural authority delegation but also psychological conditions encouraging individuals to experience meaning, competence, autonomy and influence over work outcomes. Contemporary research indicates that empowering leadership practices correlate consistently and positively with intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction, engagement and innovative employee performance (Edelmann et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020).

Meta-analyses and empirical studies conducted over the past five years confirm that organizations implementing inclusive power distribution tend to demonstrate elevated commitment levels, creativity and team effectiveness compared with organizations featuring rigid centralistic structures. Furthermore, consistent empowerment demonstrably reduces work exhaustion (burnout) and enhances psychological wellbeing, particularly within organizations bearing high workloads and task complexity (Burhan & Khan, 2024; Alazmi, 2024).

Conflict and Power: Organizational Politics Perspective

Organizational politics approaches conceptualize conflict as natural consequences of interactions among actors possessing differing interests, preferences and power access. Within this framework, organizations are understood as political arenas wherein individuals and groups construct coalitions, conduct negotiations and utilize resources for influencing strategic decisions. Contemporary research indicates conflict frequently originates not solely from perceptual differences but from power imbalances and resource distribution

perceived as unjust (Alazmi, 2024; Burhan & Khan, 2024).

Power plays central roles in determining conflict direction and outcomes. Actors possessing greater control over information, social networks and structural legitimacy tend to prove capable of framing issues, controlling agendas and suppressing resistance. However, recent empirical evidence additionally demonstrates that manipulative and exclusive power usage correlates with increased interpersonal tension, declining trust and deteriorating organizational climates (Mohamed et al., 2024; Tumba, 2024).

Conversely, transparent and ethical power utilization by leaders demonstrably reduces destructive conflict intensity whilst strengthening decision legitimacy. Recent studies affirm that procedural justice and decision-making participation function as buffer mechanisms mitigating political dynamics' negative effects upon organizational conflict (Wang et al., 2023; Edelmann et al., 2020). Accordingly, political perspectives confirm that conflict cannot be separated from power relations, with power usage quality significantly determining organizational stability and effectiveness.

Conflict Management: Contemporary Models and Approaches

Modern conflict management studies emphasize that no single conflict handling style proves invariably most effective across all situations. Contingency approaches state that conflict management style effectiveness depends heavily upon conflict type, actor relationships and problem urgency and complexity levels. Contemporary literature consistently demonstrates that collaborative approaches—emphasizing information exchange, mutual interest pursuit and integrative solutions—provide long-term benefits for relationship quality and team performance (Omale et al., 2024; Mohamed et al., 2024).

Empirical research conducted over the past five years indicates that collaborative and compromising styles correlate positively with job satisfaction, trust and organizational commitment, particularly within knowledge-based work contexts. Conversely, competitive and avoiding styles tend towards effectiveness only in certain situations, such as when decisions require rapid execution or when conflict potentially damages relationships significantly (Jumawan et al., 2024; Usendok et al., 2022).

Leaders' abilities to select and adapt conflict management styles flexibly prove to be key factors in successful conflict resolution. Leaders demonstrating flexibility in conflict management prove capable of integrating diverse perspectives, preventing emotional escalation and directing conflict towards productive problem-solving.

Leadership Roles in Conflict Management

Leaders possess strategic roles in creating work climates supporting constructive conflict resolution. Contemporary leadership literature emphasizes that conflict management effectiveness is significantly influenced by leaders' power utilization approaches, whether derived from formal positions or personal qualities including integrity, empathy and credibility. Leaders capable of balancing these two power sources tend towards greater effectiveness in building trust and managing differences productively (Yukl & Gardner, 2020; Schermuly et al., 2025).

Contemporary research demonstrates that transformational and supportive leadership contributes significantly towards promoting cooperative conflict, improving communication quality and strengthening team learning. Recent meta-analyses additionally confirm that leader-member exchange quality correlates negatively with relationship conflict and positively with collaboration-based conflict resolution (Edelmann et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2023).

Conversely, leadership excessively relying upon coercive power and formal control tends to exacerbate latent conflict whilst reducing employee engagement. Therefore, leaders' capacities for utilizing power adaptively, ethically and with relationship orientation become determining factors in creating sustainable conflict resolution supporting organizational effectiveness.

Integration of Power Theory and Conflict Management

Organizational literature demonstrates that successful conflict resolution cannot be separated from organizational actors' power execution approaches, as power usage shapes psychological, relational and structural conditions influencing conflict dynamics. Collaboratively applied power—through communication openness, employee empowerment and recognition of diverse party interests—tends to enhance procedural justice perceptions, strengthen trust and promote achievement of more adaptive and sustainable conflict solutions. Conversely, coercive and unilateral power usage frequently exacerbates latent conflict, triggers resistance and reduces organizational commitment due to limited employee participation and autonomy in decision-making processes (Alazmi, 2024; Burhan & Khan, 2024).

Empirical findings support close relationships between power usage patterns and conflict resolution quality. Research indicates that leadership power styles significantly influence organizational justice perceptions and working relationship quality, which subsequently determine whether conflict develops constructively or destructively. Cooperatively utilized power demonstrably correlates positively with conflict resolution effectiveness, job satisfaction and interpersonal trust, whilst coercive power usage tends to increase relational conflict and emotional tension within workplaces. Subsequent studies additionally affirm that constructively exercised power can direct

conflict towards productive task conflict forms, promoting collective learning and strengthening team cohesion and performance (Wang et al., 2023; Edelmann et al., 2020).

Furthermore, ethical leadership perspectives confirm that moral dimensions in power utilization play crucial roles in conflict management. Leaders utilizing power ethically and responsibly tend to create justice climates, enhance decision legitimacy and suppress destructive conflict emergence potential. Accordingly, power theory and conflict management integration affirms that both concepts constitute interrelated phenomena requiring simultaneous management within modern organizations. Power utilization approaches not only determine conflict resolution direction and outcomes but also shape interpersonal relationship quality, organizational climate and long-term performance effectiveness.

3. Discussion and Synthesis

3.1 Key Findings

The review reveals a consistent pattern: cooperative power utilization (empowerment, participatory leadership) transforms conflict into productive outcomes (innovation, learning), while coercive power exacerbates destructive conflict (resistance, disengagement). Psychological safety emerges as a critical mediator, with 7 studies confirming its role in channeling task conflict toward enhanced team performance.

3.2 Theoretical Implications

This synthesis advances organizational theory by integrating power and conflict perspectives into a unified framework. Traditional conflict management models overlook power asymmetries; this review demonstrates their interdependence, suggesting revised models incorporating power distribution as a core variable.

3.3 Research Gaps and Future Directions

Longitudinal studies tracking power-conflict dynamics over time remain scarce. Cross-

cultural comparisons and quantitative meta-analyses are needed. Future research should explore digital transformation contexts where remote work alters traditional power structures and conflict patterns.

4. Conclusion

This integrative literature review demonstrates that organizational conflict and power are inseparable phenomena that jointly shape interaction patterns, decision making processes, and effectiveness within contemporary organizations. Conflict emerges not merely from interpersonal differences but from structural arrangements, power asymmetries, and leadership practices that influence how interests are negotiated and resources are allocated. The findings indicate that conflict should not be universally regarded as detrimental; instead, its organizational consequences are contingent upon how power is exercised by organizational actors, particularly leaders.

The review highlights that cooperative, participatory, and ethically grounded uses of power facilitate constructive conflict by fostering psychological safety, procedural justice, trust, and open communication. Under such conditions, task related conflict can enhance collective learning, innovation, and decision quality while minimizing dysfunctional relationship conflict. In contrast, coercive, unilateral, and opaque power practices tend to exacerbate interpersonal tensions, resistance, and disengagement, ultimately undermining organizational commitment and long term effectiveness.

Furthermore, this study underscores the central role of leadership in managing the conflict power dynamic. Leaders who are capable of balancing formal authority with informal influence, and who adapt their conflict management approaches to situational demands, are better positioned to channel conflict toward productive outcomes. Integrating power theory with contemporary conflict management perspectives provides a more comprehensive framework for

understanding organizational conflict as a strategic and manageable phenomenon rather than an inevitable threat.

In conclusion, effective organizational functioning depends on the ability to manage conflict and power simultaneously. Organizations that consciously cultivate ethical power use, empowerment oriented leadership, and adaptive conflict management practices are more likely to achieve sustainable performance, healthy workplace relationships, and long term organizational resilience.

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