

A survey review in conflict management strategies: The case study for selected hotels in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

This study deals with conflict problems in hotels and the strategies to overcome them. The objective of the study is to put forth the possible causes of conflict as well as the alternative solutions by conducting a survey interview method with senior hotel executives to study their views, evaluations and implementations. A crucial aim of the study is to ascertain the extent to which the senior executives' intervening methods towards conflict management match up with conflict management strategies. Qualitative research method was used in the study and interview method as means of data collecting. In the scope of the research, 10 senior executives of four and five star hotels in Ankara were interviewed. The study reveals that the hotels frequently experienced conflicts among employees which caused dissatisfaction among employees as well as the guests.

Keywords: Tourism, hotels, conflict, conflict management.

INTRODUCTION

Hotel management is a sector based on manpower and serves throughout 24-7-365. Also, Hotel management is a human-oriented sector that targets at hotel guests.

Hotel businesses are places where the number of employees and guest are high and where interdependence links between employees are strongly tied. Hotels may experience higher levels of conflict compared to other businesses. Among the reasons are the labor-intensive nature of the business, large number of employees with high one-on-one relationship and interdependence among them.

Hotel Managers and owners face the challenges of keeping the delicate balance of satisfying both their guests' as well as their employees' need and demand without alienating one group versus the other. Working out and resolving the likely conflicts are mostly the responsibility of the hotelier. If hoteliers could prevent possible conflicts before they occur or if they find a stark solution, they would be successful and the business will gain and the moral would improve.

This paper will examine, first, the relevant literature review, including the description of conflict management, reasons of conflict, its types, its impacts on organization, its solution ways, and description and features of hotel businesses. Meanwhile, general differences between city and resort hotels are discussed. The second main part of the study, include information on methods used in the study and the field; conflicts and practiced solutions at four & five star hotels in Ankara, Turkey.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Conflict management

Conflict can be defined as a process based on interaction of a disaccord, and disagreement between social groups (Antonioni 1998 p. 9). According to Rahim, it is disagreement and negative interaction between person and groups (1985, p. 81). Different point of views, aspects, needs and expectations constitute the root of conflict (Gürüz & Gürel, 2006, p. 377).

It is possible to run into conflicts in every place where there are people. Surely, there will be disaccord, discrepancy and disagreement between people. Conflict will come into being as long as there are differences among interests, beliefs, values, and desires in choices of people (Karip, 2000). It is impossible not to experience conflict at the businesses which cannot be run without people; especially, in businesses which embody a large number of staff.

Conflict, at large, brings quarrelling, fighting and dilapidating into our minds. These are only exaggerated descriptions of conflict. Hoteliers have been facing blames, criticisms, complains and customer dissatisfaction throughout a typical business day. Conflict, in contemporary business life, may create a positive effect on making decision and power use (Barutçugil, 2002). However, Erdoğan defines conflict as a facing to unwanted things in social structure, or as an emotional structure when forced to make a decision (1999). Stoner explained conflict as sharing scarce sources of two and more people or groups among themselves, or disagreements resulted from sharing activities and differences of person or groups on aim, statute, value, evaluation and perception (1978).

In other words, conflict in an organization may be defined as events resulted from troubles of persons and groups working together, and so, halting or confusing common activities (Eren 2004). However, Thomas says that it is a process arising after an employee sensed that s/he was prevented doing work by another employee (1992).

Slothfulness, low morale, low productivity, and hence, low performance will be seen in organizations which conflicts are not experienced. Creativeness and innovation will not be experienced in organizations (Bakan and Yeşil, 2006, p. 38). Baykal and Kovancı emphasize that although competitive is useful until at a certain point, it will cause non-functional conflicts when exceeded organizational purpose (2008).

Conflict management is a series of actions or counter-action to culminate the conflict into a resolution in a specific way by the person involved in such conflict or the third party (Karip 2000). In other words, conflict management is utilization from disaccord and discomfort between parties by taking the conflict level between persons or groups under control (Hampton and Summer, 1982).

Conflict in hotel industries can be viewed as disaccord, disagreement, discrepancy, and divergence between two businesses, as well as between employees, departments of the business, employees-guests, and guests-guests. Conflict management in hotels can be defined as a process of using and implementing information, technique, skill and experiment in accordance with existing circumstances to help in solving the matter (Batman and Arpacı, 2008). Van Fleet regarded as one of the biggest mistakes of hoteliers not to pay attention to employees' complains (1993).

There may be myriad causes of conflict in particular businesses such as differences in gender, nationality, age, educational background and position of authority among individuals and groups who may be collaborating to achieve the objective targets of the business. To be aware of the reason and the extent of the conflict in organization, it is crucial to identify alternative ways for managing conflict. There are plenty of issues that may contribute to any conflict situation. Causes of conflict may vary based on the group, individuals, place/organization and circumstances. Past unresolved conflicts could be the underlying reason for current and existing conflicts (Bumin, 1990). Overall, conflict is normal, diverse of opinions is good, and the process of managing conflict is as important as the result (Yelkikalan 2006). The sources of organizational conflict can be individual differences, organizational structure, and communication deficiencies.

Conflicts are seen almost in every organization and decision groups. How the organization or decision group will cope with it, is an important factor for organization's effectiveness (Poole and et al., 1991, p. 926). It is possible to see conflict in every place where human beings exist. Especially, conflict is experienced more in hotel industries which are based on manpower densely. Now that it isn't possible to abolish conflict, we should learn how to sustain our working life with it. It is necessary to conduct conflict not to be affected adversely from it. For this reason, adverse and positive sides of conflict should be known.

It is stated that many factors like interpersonal interaction, relations, attitudes, personalities, organizational structure and system have roles in the emergence of conflict (Topaloğlu and Avcı, 2008, p. 77). Frequently a particular conflict and subsequent solution start from and end in the same point of origin (Sökmen and Yazıcıoğlu, 2005, p. 17). The methods that hoteliers will use in managing the conflict must be based on the reason which the conflict arose (Deniz and Çolak, 2008, p. 329). Conflict may relate to the type of the organization, or the character of staff, and managers. Factors that cause conflict can be classified into two main reasons; organizational and personal (Baykal and Kovancı, 2008, p. 24).

Erkuş and Tabak, as a result of their researches, indicated that there were relations between conflict management and personal traits at the course of conflict or discussion (Erkuş and Tabak 2009, p. 236). Solutions related to organizational conflict could be divided into three; encouragement of conflict, temporary and permanent solutions to conflict. Encouragement of conflict is the selection of appropriate administrator, re-construction of the organization, gaining new staff to organization, and encouragement for competition.

Temporary solutions are apathy, avoiding, pressure, softening, reconciliation, and leaving the solution to administrator's decision. Permanent solutions are solving matter, team-management, constituting upper goals, increasing communication, and changing structural-variables and staff positions.

1.2. Hotels

Hotel is defined as the place where accommodation, food, and drinks are supplied to the people who desire to pay for provided-service without any special agreement required by the business (Medlik, 1972).

Hotel businesses have a complicated structure and operate in a service-sector, with distinguished features (below) different from other businesses (Şener 2007; Batman, 2008):

- Hotel businesses are time sensitive - the offered products and services are time sensitive and cannot be stockpiled.
- Hotel businesses are labor-intensive businesses - hotel businesses run mostly on manpower while operating.
- Hotel management is dynamic - hotel management operation is changing continuously and adapting to new technological innovation and management style.
- Hotel businesses operate 7/24. Hotel staff should do their duty foolproof and should do their best to offer a comfortable stopover for their guests who travel in various times and for various reasons.
- Services in hotels require collaboration and mutual assistance between departments and staff. Hotel businesses are commercial and social businesses which include many departments that have close connections with one another.
- Majority of the capital in hotel industries are based on constant values. It requires a large sum of fund to establish and operate hotels. The large sum of that capital needs to be invested on constant values before the business begins to operate.

Basic differences between city and resort hotels

City hotels are businesses which offer service throughout 12 months, and which have different types of guests from Resort hotels'. These kinds of hotels are the places which covers largely quotidian needs like business travels, meetings etc. The differences between City and Resort hotels go as follow (Çalık, 2009);

- City hotels operate throughout 12 months in a year. However, resort hotels largely operate seasonally.
- Rate of staff changing at resort hotels is higher than city hotels.
- Resort hotels are long-term accommodations. This is partly the same as city hotels, but they should be more up-to-date and dynamic.
- The main differences between city and resort hotels are guest type, duration of stay, and offered services. So, city hotels have to work relentlessly to keep products and services brisk. That is the salient for sale and marketing. Because, guests of city hotels are not just tourists and holiday visitors.
- At city hotels, guests can learn the culture, tradition, customs, and life-style of host country in a very short time. However, that learning can take longer at resort hotels.
- The quality of the service offered in city hotels is higher than resort hotels'.
- City hotels support the economies of countries throughout 12 months.

- City Hotels have a large market. Business guests, government and fair organizations, wedding organizations, dinner parties, individual guests, the guests of travel agencies which have tours. City hotels have an upward trend even in financial and economic crises.

2. SURVEY STUDY

The basic aim of this qualitative study is to display the causes of and solutions for conflict in hotel businesses. Furthermore, the objective was to obtain hoteliers' view (managing four & five star hotels in Ankara) and their opinion regarding the causes of conflict and the critical factors that would help to achieve satisfactory resolutions. Another aim is to show how these hoteliers approach towards conflicts at their businesses, what their possible solutions are, and the extent to which their solutions would match up with conflict management strategies.

Research findings were obtained using interview technique. A semi-structured Interview Form Approach was used in this study. The population of the research consisted of four & five star hotels in Ankara. There are total 42 four & five star hotels in Ankara, of which 11 are designated as five stars, according to the Ankara Culture and Tourism Directorship. The research is consisted of 10 hoteliers and hotel businesses, seven of which are five-star, and three of which are four-star.

Based on existing directory of hotels, interview request letters were sent out to each business by means of postal delivery or e-mail, and by telephone if they could not be reached. As a result of all these studies, total 10 businesses were interviewed. The names of interviewed businesses were not revealed in this study and hotels have been identified by random designation of the alphabet (i.e. Hotel A, B, and C with their designated star classifications...). This would help to keep the names and the responses confidential and anonymous.

3. FINDINGS & PROPOSITIONS

Interview form technique was used to survey the hoteliers. We used content analysis method in the study because some documents were compared with one another. Table 1 summarizes the results of the survey study.

Data related to conflict frequency in peak and dead seasons and among whom they were experienced in the interviewed businesses are shown in Table 1. Conflicts in the businesses were identified from 1 to 3 in the column that shows among whom conflicts were seen most. The categorization contains the conflict between staff & staff, staff & administrator (managerial hierarchy), and guest & staff. Hoteliers were asked to convey the conflict frequency and among whom they were seen mostly in peak and dead seasons. The followings are a summary of interview responses:

- Conflict is seen mostly between staff & staff. The responses from interviews indicate the rivalry among departments and groups as a primary source of conflict.
- Conflict is more prevalent in hotels with competitive employee reward systems
- Lack of proper communication among the hotel staff and departments contribute to more conflicts in the organization.
- The frequency of conflict is higher during the “high season” period.
- The conflict may end in either positive results (diminishing monotony, timely intervention, noticing and anticipating a problem and being prepared for the future) or negative results (productivity slowdown, labor losses, customer/guest complaints).

- Hoteliers prefer long-term and permanent solutions to short-term quick fixes.
- The years of working experience of hoteliers in their businesses and the management/leadership experience in total were significant in dealing with conflict resolutions among staff, departments and with guests.

4. REMARKS

Conflict is disaccord, discrepancy and disagreement in people affairs. Conflict will exist as long as there is incongruity in communication between people. Although conflict sounds like a negative term to people, it can hold a positive meaning in addition to negative meaning. It is impossible not to experience conflict in the businesses which include and deal with people. When keeping that in mind, conflicts in hotels may be more prevalent than in other businesses because hotel industries include more staff than most other sectors. Conflict in hotel businesses can be defined as disaccord, discrepancy and disagreement between two separate businesses, employees themselves, departments themselves, guests and employees, and guest themselves.

Conflict management is something that converts conflict into an advantage. It is necessary to manage the conflicts to make them functional. While functional conflicts can bring dynamism, non-functional conflicts can cause decrease of performance in the business. Conflict management in hotel industry can be defined as a process of implementing information, techniques, skills and experiments in accordance with existing circumstances to help in solving disaccord, discrepancy and contrariety which are the reasons of conflict in businesses.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is understood from the results of the research that businesses with more staff and guests have more conflicts. The frequency of conflicts in businesses is “daily” in peak season and twice or third times in a week in dead seasons, and by large between guest & staff.

Hoteliers should minimize non-functional conflicts by taking necessary precautions. That is only possible if hoteliers have knowledge of conflict management. Also, conflict between guest & staff must be minimized. It should not be forgotten that guest pleasure is a privileged issue.

2. Goal discrepancies are the primary reasons of conflicts arising out of personal differences.

Hoteliers should prepare and education their employees on common ground and find common aim.

3. Primary conflict reason arising out of organizational structure is competitive reward system.

Hoteliers should establish clear reward system while they encourage their staff to compete. The staff who will be rewarded must be the one who everyone agrees on. The rewarded staff should not always be from the same department.

4. Another reason arising out of organizational structure is hoteliers’ management and leadership differences.

Hoteliers' vision and policies should be recognized and adopted by staff. There should not be differences in hotel administrators' vision and Mission, which may lead to conflict.

5. Another reason is functional dependence. According to results of the research, conflicts between departments have been experienced mostly between departments which have functional dependence with one another.

Duties and responsibilities of departments which have dependence to each other must be clearly determined by hoteliers.

6. Primary reasons of conflict arising from communication are lack of knowledge and insufficient rest.

Hoteliers should ensure the efficient flow of information between staff. They ought to prevent conflicts arising out of inadequate knowledge. Lack of information may lead to slowing of functions of the business or leading to operations failure.

7. Lack of proper "listening" and not paying adequate attention to and communicating the potential issues would be another source of conflict.

If necessary, hoteliers should give in-service training to staff. They must give necessary support to staff to be a good listener. It must not be forgotten that guests want to be listened by staff.

8. Conflicts are seen mostly between departments.

Hoteliers should supply necessary training to minimize these kinds of conflicts, and should specify responsibilities of departments and rules of the business in written. At the same time, hoteliers must be careful in watching departments to avoid infringements into other departments.

9. Inter-personal conflicts in businesses.

Hoteliers should not ignore these kinds of conflicts. They must develop policies to prevent inter-personal conflicts and to make sure that staff would adhere to policies and regulations.

10. Conflicts that are felt (gut feeling).

If hoteliers "sense" a conflict situation, they should take action immediately when recognizing the problem on the horizon. They should keep in mind the thought of conflict possibility in all places where there are people.

11. Non-functional conflicts.

Hoteliers ought to convert conflict into an advantage for their businesses by making them functional. If that is not possible, they should find exact solutions for the conflict. Hoteliers should be open to functional conflicts, and should eliminate non-functional conflicts. They should not overlook conflict reality while having strategic plan for future.

12. Conflicts with adverse outcome.

Hoteliers should strive to get positive results from conflicts in the business. They must be open toward positive conflicts so that their businesses will attain a dynamic structure. Functional conflicts ought to be encouraged.

13. Wrong and uncertain solutions to the conflicts.

Hoteliers should find stark solutions to conflicts they experience. They should not lose time by bringing wrong solutions. Hoteliers should find appropriate solution methods by profoundly analyzing the conflicts. Hoteliers should not count only on their experience while searching for solution.

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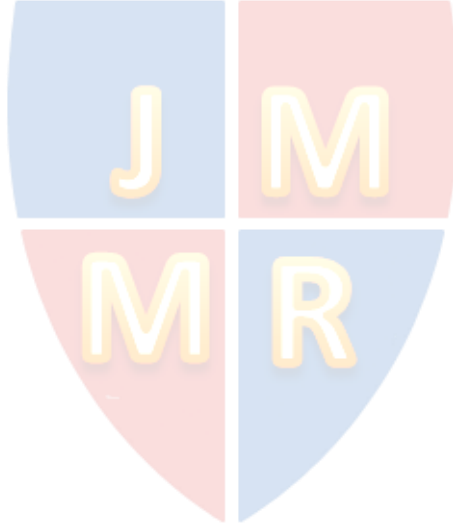


Table-1: General finding table concerning businesses and hoteliers in the research

| Hotel Name | Class | Staff Number | Conflict Frequency in Peak Seasons | Conflict Frequency in Dead Seasons | Between Whom Conflicts Seen Most | Hoteliers' Name & Surname | Age | How Many Years has s/he been working at the sector | How many years has s/he been an hotelier | Solution Method of the hotelier |
|------------|--------|--------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|-----|--|--|---------------------------------|
| Hotel A | 5 Star | 100–150 | Everyday | Third or four times in a week | Guest & Staff | M.K | 36 | 16 Years | 3 years | Permanent |
| Hotel B | 5 Star | 200–250 | Everyday | Twice or third times in a week | Staff & Staff | R.G | 68 | 16 Years | 16 Years | Permanent |
| Hotel C | 4 Star | 50–100 | Four or five times in a week | Once or twice in a week | Staff & Staff | Y.B | 51 | 35 Years | 10 Years | Permanent |
| Hotel D | 4 Star | 50–100 | Five or six times in a week | twice or third times in a week | Staff & Staff | F.K | 32 | 12 Years | 6 Years | Permanent |
| Hotel E | 5 Star | 100–150 | Third or four times in a week | Once or twice in a week | Staff & Staff | A.G | 32 | 7 Years | 5 Years | Permanent |
| Hotel F | 5 Star | 100–150 | Four or five times in a week | Once or twice in a week | Staff & Staff | Ö.B | 41 | 27 Years | 11 Years | Permanent |
| Hotel G | 4 Star | 50–100 | Everyday | Four or five times in a week | Staff & Staff | O.T | 42 | 19 Years | 5 Years | Permanent |
| Hotel H | 5 Star | 200–250 | Everyday | Twice or third times in a week | Guest & Staff | H.U | 49 | 9 Years | 9 Years | Permanent |
| Hotel I | 5 Star | 200–250 | Four or five times in a week | Twice or third times in a week | Staff & Staff | N.B | 30 | 7 Years | 7 Years | Permanent |
| Hotel J | 5 Star | 200–250 | Four or five times in a week | Twice or third times in a week | Staff & Staff | İ.D | 32 | 10 Years | 10 Years | Permanent |