The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Conflict Management

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ABSTRACT

Emotional intelligence is panacea in the management of conflict. A house divided against each other disintegrates. Emotional intelligence can silence the gun and rebuild relationships. Cooperation and collaboration in the global village among global villagers is handy if they are to operate peacefully and leave no one behind in development. The African continent is one family and this continent's inhibitors should be mature and employ emotional intelligence in resolutions of all sorts of conflicts. Understanding of each other's moods and emotions lead to self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, motivation and social skills. This leads to conflict resolutions, enjoyment of harmony and promotion of peace and tranquillity. The diversity of nationalities, interests, beliefs, views and values of people working in various industries, organisations and those in families is bound to create conflicts, however if emotional intelligence is put into practice these conflicts can easily be avoided and/or rectified without the gun and all forms of violence. Hence, this article explores the role of emotional intelligence in conflict management. The article uses existing literature and proffers thought provoking aspects of emotional intelligence in conflict management and peace building. It attempts to bring out the potential of emotional intelligence in building peaceful homes, societies and nations. Understanding of the value of articulating effective communication, as well as the importance of intentional listening is recommended when leaders negotiate conflicts and sometimes mediate conflicts between nations, industries, organisations and individuals in order for people of diverse cultures and beliefs to learn from and tolerate each other.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, conflict management, conflicts, conflicts resolutions, moods, emotions, feelings

INTRODUCTION

"If the driving force of intelligence in twentieth century business has been IQ, then . . . in the dawning twenty-first century it will be EQ" (Cooper and Sawaf, 1997: xxvii). A person with knowledge is better placed than the one just holding a gun because the one holding a gun might not know how and when to pull a trigger. Business owners and leaders are beginning to realize that emotional intelligence is important – if not more valuable than experience and other measurable. It is even more powerful than guns and shows wisdom in conflict management. Today one has to run very fast in order to stay in the same place (Kotler, 2005). We are living in an environment characterised by dynamic, volatile, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, diversity and disruptive (DVUCADD). This environment demands a special soft skill called emotional intelligence for easy adaptation, innovation and survival (Mutongi and Mwerahare, 2018:86). Emotional intelligence was birthed by John D. Mayer and Peter Salavey and popularised by Daniel Goleman. McCathy (2022) alludes that conflict is not by nature good or bad but simply means a difference of opinion or interests which is an inevitable occurrence in any workplace. Conflict is difficult because it

triggers our acute stress response and we typically react with "fight" or "flight." If one tends to be aggressive, "fight" will likely be their response to conflict. This reaction to conflict can be explained through the Shona proverbial lore which says, *Maisirihaatyimanenjiesango* (a female hunter is not discouraged by the mysteries of forest). She continues fighting the impediments till she wins. If one is not aggressive, "flight" will be the response. This is rightly explained by the Shona adage, *gwaraharinambonje* (a coward avoids fighting to evade injury). Either reaction bypasses our rational mind and makes it difficult to act logically. Emotional intelligence can be of use in managing conflicts erupting from situations like this.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional Intelligence is defined differently by various scholars but all seem to agree that it involves the ability to understand one's feelings, moods and emotions as well as feelings, moods and emotions of others as evidenced in the following definitions. Mayer and Salovey (1989:189) define emotional intelligence (EI) as;

The subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions (Mayer and Salovey, 1989: 189)

For Goleman (1998:16) emotional intelligence refers to:

The capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those in others, for motivating ourselves, for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships (Goleman, 1998: 16).

Kourdi (2015) propounds that emotional intelligence is taking information from your own emotions and the emotions of others and then applying that information in order to be successful. Jones and George (2011:117) propounds that in understanding the effects of managers' and all employees' moods and emotions, it is important to take into account their levels of emotional intelligence. Mutongi and Mwerahare (2018) aver that emotional intelligence is the ability to understand one's moods and emotions and the moods and emotions of others.

The fundamental task of leaders, we argue is to prime good feeling in those they lead. Great leadership works through effective handling of the emotions. No matter what leaders set out to do, whether it is creating strategy or mobilizing teams to action, their success depends on how they sow it. Even if the led get everything else just right, if leaders fail in this primal task of driving emotions in the right direction, all they do will amount to nothing (Goleman, 2003). Leaders' emotional intelligence is what influences followers to rise above individual interest and emotionally commit to transform their spheres of work to excellence in order to satisfy new goals (Bass, 1985; Kotter 1996; Hitt et al, 1998). Understanding and managing one's feeling senablesus to control our moods and emotions. This guides us not stretch to extremes and/or affects our performance and relationships with people we interface with in our daily activities. Understanding and tolerating the desires, moods and emotions of others enhances our empathy development and places us in a better position to identify with each other, hence manage and resolve conflicts.

Conflict Management

Conflict is difficult to define, because it occurs in many different settings. The conflict perspective is based on the idea that society consists of different groups who struggle with one another to attain scarce societal resources that are considered valuable, be they money, power, and prestige or cherished values. In brief conflict is premised on the fight to satisfy one's interests ahead of others'. These resources form the bases of conflict (Gunduza and Namusi, 2004). Conflict is a natural occurrence in any social or organisational setting, arising from differences in opinions, values, goals, or interests among individuals or groups. While

conflict itself is not inherently negative, the way it is managed can have significant implications for relationships, productivity and overall well-being. Traditional approaches to conflict management often focus on problem-solving techniques and negotiation strategies. However, this study highlights the importance of emotional intelligence in effectively addressing conflicts and fostering positive outcomes. Conflict management can be defined as the process of dealing with (perceived) incompatibilities or disagreements arising from, for example, diverging groups, opinions, objectives, and needs.

The essence of conflict seems to be disagreement, contradiction, or incompatibility. Thus, conflict refers to any situation in which there are incompatible goals, cognitions, or emotions with or between individuals or groups that lead to opposition or antagonistic interaction. Even an individual can experience conflicting ideas and thoughts that may impact on own emotional intelligence. The definition recognizes three basic types of conflict: goal conflict is a situation in which desired end states or preferred or expected outcomes appear to be incompatible. Cognitive conflict is a situation in which ideas or thoughts are inconsistent. Affective conflict is a situation in which feelings or emotions are incompatible; that is, people literally become angry with one another. Conflict is very common and inevitable in organisational settings, but without conflict there will be no creativity, hence no innovation (Whitworth, 2005). Conflict is viewed here as not necessarily a negative feature; as the resolution of it often leads to constructive problem solving. However, conflict sometimes begets violence. As a control measure the contemporary international law, has a general prohibition of the use of force in international relations. According to the textual formulation of the Charter of the United Nations (1945), the only exception to this general prohibition is the use of force in self-defence.

Theories of Conflict

The following are the theories of conflict:

Unitary perspective

The organisation is viewed as an integrated, cooperated and harmonious whole. There is an image of the organisation as a team, it calls for team spirit. Conflict is seen as an undesirable and dysfunctional outcome that can be explained for example by poor communication, personality clashes or the work of agitators. Trade unions are seen as an unnecessary evil and destructive practice as outmoded and caused by trouble makers.

Pluralistic perspective

The organisation is made up of powerful and competing sub-groups with their own legitimate loyalties, objectives and leaders. Conflict is not necessarily a bad thing all the time, but can be an agent for evolution and internal and external change.

Functional perspective

Conflict can be functional as evidenced by the functional perspective. Haralambos and Holborn (2004) asset that functionalists stress the extent to which different elements of the social structure fit together harmoniously. The functionalist perspectives socializing agencies contribute to the maintenance of social order.

Marxism perspective

Marxists stress the lack of fit between the different parts, particularly social classes and so emphasize the

potential for conflict (Haralambos and Holborn, 2004:935). There are a variety of interpretations and adaptations of Marx's work and some neo–Marxists question some of the concepts used by Marx, while accepting his overall approach. Other conflict theorists agree with Marx and neo-Marxists that there is conflict in society but disagree about the causes and types if conflict. They draw upon the works of Max Weber, who argued that many groups, apart from classes, can be in conflict for the scarce resources in society.

VIEWS OF CONFLICTS

The following are the different views of conflict:

Traditional view of conflict

Traditional view of Conflict developed in the late 1930s and early 1940s, has a mostly linear and simple approach towards conflict. According to the traditional view, any conflict in any organization is outright bad, negative and harmful. Although conflicts are of different types, the traditional view only sees conflict as dysfunctional and destructive. This is the view that all conflict is bad and must be avoided.

Human relations view of conflict

The Human relations view of conflict observe it as natural and inevitable outcome in any group and has potential to be positive force in contributing to a group's performance. From the late 1940s to the mid-70s, the human relations view dominated the topic of organizational conflict. In that period, the fields of management and organizational behaviour were expanding. The traditional view was challenged by various studies and surveys, and therefore, the human relations view on organizational conflict presented a significantly different perspective on the topic. The human relations view on organizational conflict primarily teaches us to accept conflict and adapt to change. It identifies conflict as an important aspect of any organization, which simply cannot be more important. Unlike the traditional view, the human relations view does not discard conflict as an outright negative and destructive thing. Instead, it says that an organizational conflict may be beneficial for the individuals, groups and the organization in general. Moreover, this perspective even suggests that organizational conflicts within groups may even lead to better group performance and outcome. The human relations view of conflict treats conflict as a natural and inevitable phenomenon and, so cannot be eliminated from any organization. Conflict is disruptive in nature for disruption brings with it change, that is either good or bad. Disruption shakes the centre and repositions it bringing out change expected or unintended.

Interactionist view of conflict

This is the view that says some conflicts are necessary for a group to perform effectively. Not suggesting that all conflicts are good or positive force in a group to perform effectively. Some conflicts are functional as propounded by the functionalist perspective that all things have a purpose in life. There can be dysfunctional conflicts which are conflicts that prevent a people from achieving their goals. While the human relations view accepts organizational conflict as an important part, the interactionist view on organizational conflict takes the same concept further. It suggests that an ongoing, minimum level of conflict is necessary and beneficial for a group. In the interactionist view, an organization or group with no conflict is more likely to become static, non-responsive, inflexible and inadaptable for where two or more people meet, there is exchange of energies that influence change towards good or bad outputs. It notes that a minimum level of conflict is beneficial for the group because it maintains a certain level of creativity, self-evaluation, and competition among individuals and these result in increased group performance, more creative solutions to problems and better outcomes.

Models of emotional intelligence

Spielberger (2004) has suggested three major models of emotional intelligence: The Salovey and Mayer Model: Model defines emotional intelligence as the ability to perceive, understand, manage and use emotions to facilitate thinking. It contains four subscales: perceiving emotions, using emotions to simplify thought, understanding and managing emotions (Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, 2000: 396). Mixed model of emotional intelligence is the Bar-On model (1997), developed by Reuven Bar-On. The Bar-On Model emphasizes on an interrelated emotional and social competencies measured by self-report. The self-report consists of five scales: intrapersonal, interpersonal, adaptability, stress management, and general mood (Baron, 2010: 55). The Goleman Model: Model describes the construct as competencies and skills that are controlled by emotional being. It has five subscales: self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills which aremanaging relationships (Goleman, 1998). Goleman's (1995) claims that EI can matter more than IQ and suggested a redefining of what it means to be smart.

CHARACTERISTICS OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Goleman (2006) presents the following characteristics that can be used in boosting emotional intelligence:
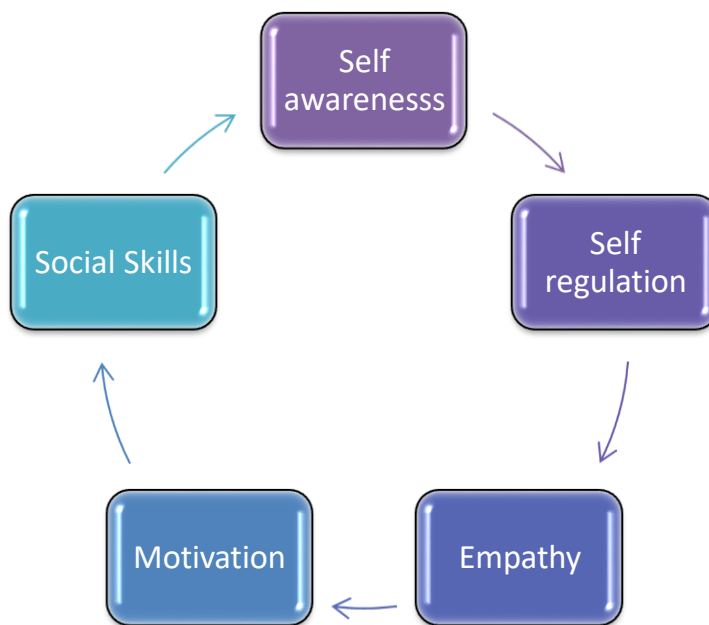
Self-awareness

For one to achieve emotional intelligence, one has to have self-awareness. There is need to read, peruse, understand and scrutinize that book called you, the You Book. For one to achieve a lot, one must be able to self-criticise. The most difficult person to understand is oneself. Emotionally self-aware leaders can be candid, authentic and able to speak openly about their emotions or with conviction about their guiding vision (Goleman, Boyatzis and Mckee, 2003). Self-awareness is the ability to have a deeper understanding of self. You need to read, peruse, evaluate and critique that book called you. There is need to identify your gaps, strengths and weaknesses. Maintain your strengths and work hard on your weaknesses to turn them into strengths. Reese (2022) avers that because our eyes are fixed in the front of our heads we normally do not see ourselves. Self-awareness during conflict includes being able to *see* how the other people involved in the conflict perceive you. In training, people are trained to *have empathy*, but how do you see the situation through someone else's eyes? Other people see your body language and tone of voice and interpret the signals through their own perceptual filters. Therefore, to understand how another person is feeling, you

need to get a sense of how *they* are seeing *you*. Individuals who are aware of their own emotions and triggers are better able to regulate their responses in conflict situations, avoiding impulsive or reactive behaviour that can escalate tensions

Self-regulation

Self-regulation is the ability to control emotions and impulses. One should not make impulsive and careless decisions. The Shona explicitly express it through, *ndidyendidyeakadyazvimbishi* (more haste, spoil the brood). Fallen (2008) argues that "you do not have to accept the invitation to get angry. Instead practice forgiveness, empathy and encouragement". One should not make decisions whilst angry and emotional. For the things that you cannot do, have the ability to say no. Failure to self-regulate results in disastrous situations and the Shona would say, *mandikurumidzeakazvaramandinonoke* (doing things in a rush ends in delaying the process). Reece (2022) opines that high-EQ people have the ability to slow down and visualize outcomes. Instead of letting reactions dictate behaviour, they can pursue possible strategies to achieve desired outcomes. Their energy is focused on slowing down and suppressing the urge of the emotional brain to react, while making conscious choices about what to do. Self-regulation is the skill set that enables you to exert conscious *control* over your behaviour in a situation where your reactions could sabotage the targeted outcome. Individuals who can control their emotions and impulses are more likely to remain calm and composed during conflicts, enabling them to think rationally and make sound decisions.

Motivation

Goleman (2003) encapsulates that self-motivation is a key component of emotional intelligence. Being driven by only money or material rewards is not a beneficial characteristic (Goleman, 1995). A passion for what you do is far better for your emotional intelligence. This leads to sustained motivation, clear decision making and a better understanding of the organisation's aims making a person achievement driven and to strive to improve and excel, be highly productive, committed and optimistic. Motivation influences people to be highly effective, initiative and innovative in utilising this motivation type called intrinsic motivation. For example, Dr Guramatunhu is self-motivated in his giving assistance to persons with visual disabilities (PWVDs). Martin Luther King Jr had a dream in emancipating of the black Americans thereby bringingpeace in conflicts.

Empathy

There is need to put self in someone's shoes. Imagine experiencing the same life that person would have lived; probably you were going to execute worst things. Empathy makes us understand each other better and aid in avoiding stereotyping, prejudicing and judging others too quickly. Followers always look up to a leader for supportive emotional connection –for empathy. When leaders drive emotions positively, as was the case with the second executive at the BBC, they bring out everyone's best (Goleman, 2003) they feel involved and owners of the initiative. Because of lack of empathy, at some work place an employee was marked absent yet that person had been involved in a fatal accident while coming to work and died. Handy (2007) alludes that:

"many of us are, l believe, confused by the world we have created for ourselves ....the new fashion for turning everything into a business, even our own lives, doesn't seem to be the answer. A hospital and my life is more than a business".

If one sees everything as a business, then empathy falls off. Jairos Jiri was not disabled but empathised with disabled leading him to establish Jairos Jiri Centres across Zimbabwe to cater for the people with disabilities through providing welfare, education and training. One of the renowned musicians Paul Matavire was a product of the Jairos Jiri initiatives. This shows that understanding others brings solutions to challenges and

improved empathy can reduce conflicts, stress, build more positive relationships and even boost revenues. Mother Theresa in her empathy towards the needy indicated that the main reason of poverty was lack of love and she demonstrated this love to the less privileged. When individuals demonstrate empathy towards others' perspectives and emotions, they are more likely to engage in constructive dialogue and find common ground to resolve conflicts.

Social Skills

One has to be friendly, approachable, and sociable. A person should be easy to talk to and easy to talk to others. Not that leaders need to be overly "nice", the emotional art of leadership includes pressing the reality of work demands without unduly upsetting people (Goleman, 2003). One has to be an excellent communicator and a master at building and maintain relationships in order to effectively manage disputes. Charam et al (2001) rightly avers that managers who issue orders, jealously guard information and make unilateral decisions would not get the best performance from their people. The old line managers who controlled people by controlling information are an anachronism. Today, employees expect to have access to what was formerly considered privileged information and to be involved in the decision making process by being allowed a certain amount of latitude in the way they carry out assignments. That is, they want direction but also want freedom to reach a destination in their own way. Social skills, including effective leadership, effective communication, active listening and negotiation abilities, are essential for managing conflicts in interpersonal relationships and group settings.
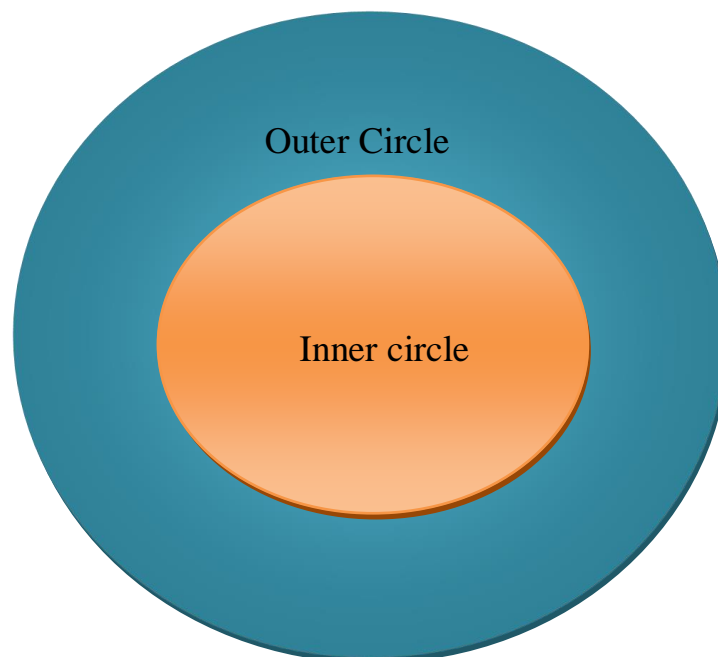
The Inner and the Outer Circle

Figure 1: The outer and inner circle model

We all face misfortunes in life; it is how we handle those misfortunes that make a difference. Mutongi and Mazhawidza (2017) introduced inner and the outer circle model that we can be used to boost emotional intelligence. The inner circle is made up of circumstances that one can control. In this regard one needs to work on how to with that circumstance one has control over. There are take steps on how one can handle such a situation. Mutongi and Mazhawidza (2017) aver that in life there are a lot of forces of change and situations that one can experience that one has control over and these situations are classified under the outer circle for example death. One just has to accept that the situation cannot be changed. They are not saying

one does not need to grief when there is a subtraction of one of the family member but should not allow the grief to lead to stress hence affecting one's health and present a potential to taking away more life.

Emotional Intelligence in Conflict Management

Using your emotional intelligence in conflict can resolve primary level confrontations and fallout. Likewise, a lack of emotional intelligence self-awareness and focus can result in greater interpersonal conflict (Jerus, 2022). To create achievable and sustainable priorities when working with others, your EQ inner resolution needs to establish what's truly important and to what degree. It is a common sense that violence, the use of gun and hate speeches cannot be the best solution when one is in his proper senses and is using critical thinking. There is need to carry out cost best analysis. One has to ask self what benefit is there in the destruction of people through wars and fighting? Instead of brandishing a gun with bullets one should perused self to carry a new gun which is emotional intelligence, that vomits without bullets and leaves, no casualties but enduring relationships.

Jerus (2022) comes up with the following emotional self-management of conflict:

- **Be conscious, deliberate and self-aware.** Understand the causes, effects of conflict and personal triggers.
- **Have self-discipline, management and control.** Assume personal responsibility to the ways conflict and confrontation are addressed. Make good choices.
- **Master negative thoughts and feelings.** Free floating hostility, revenge thinking, anger, depression and a variety of negatives release counter-productive feelings. Not only are these self-defeating but are also contagious. Negative emotions keep both sides away from positive answers.
- **Have respect and constructive empathy.** Start with the self. Determine to be the person you choose to be. Do not let feelings take over. Have positive thoughts about others. They are not the enemies. They merely have a different point of view and/or set of interests. Understanding supports resolution.
- **Nurture positive thoughts and emotions.** Optimism, likability and warmth make it easier for others to agree with you. Think and act with a good-natured attitude and others tend to respond in kind. Think positive…. look for opportunities. Seek to learn and serve. The outcomes are more advantageous.
- **Think abundance.** Look for opportunities for everyone to gain. Win/win results are more acceptable to both sides. Consider possibilities and look for creative choices. Avoid thinking that looks for winners and losers.
- **Have integrity and ethics.** Operate with clear values and principles. Avoid games playing and be a trustworthy negotiator. Think long-term resolution and future relationships.
- **Encourage everyone to think creatively.** More possibilities and options set the stage for better answers. With positive feelings, it's easier to communicate and take appropriate risks.
- **Communicate constructively.** Consider verbal and nonverbal signals (yours and theirs). Listen. Take in feedback. Be an active partner in information sharing and management.
- **Build relationships.** Use conflict and confrontation as learning experiences. Let them deepen connections and empower collaboration and connection in future dealings.

In relationships, acting with emotional intelligence leads to fewer conflicts and enhanced communication; it also signifies consideration, empathy, and respect (2023). When one applies emotional intelligence in conflict, negative expressions and emotional hostility is managed and stress and tensions are lowered. The potential for mutual gains and cost effective answers grow dramatically. Reece (2022) reiterates that we have each had a lifetime to observe what happens when our emotions get triggered during conflict. Your reactions may include anger, defensiveness, blaming, attacking, stonewalling, yelling, clamming up or shutting down, in varying degrees or combinations; our reactions are as individual as we are. Any of these

not resourceful reactions can derail what might otherwise have been a conflict-resolving conversation. So what triggers these reactions in you? The answers rests with the individual. If you can identify and monitor your triggers during a conflict interaction or dialogue, you have a much better chance of keeping the triggers from being unconsciously pulled.

McCathy (2015) alludes that a productive way to handle conflict is by calling on our emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence affects how we manage behaviour, navigate social situations, and make decisions. To use emotional intelligence in conflict resolution, make calm statements of fact, ask questions, and listen. Try to understand the other person's point of view without judgment. Tell the facts as you see them and how they affect you. Explain the outcome you are hoping for and ask for other ideas for solutions. This will lead to a discussion that cannot degenerate into conflict but resolve the conflict that recognizes and meets everyone's needs. Mahatma Gandhi believed more than anything else in the power of non-violent and dictation of purpose (Sahukar, 2018). Reece (2022) opines that people with high emotional intelligence EQs are clearly more effective in resolving conflict than low-EQ people. As someone who teaches conflict management skills, I have found that it is not enough merely to teach the techniques of conflict negotiation and resolution. If you expect the training to be effective, you also have to raise EQ levels.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are proffered:

- Instead of being controlled by emotions one should be in a position to control his emotions. This promotes effective conflict management.
- Organisations should always measure emotional intelligence ability of their prospective employees at recruitment stage in order to curb or limit conflicts in the bud.
- When conflicts rise within a group of people living or working together, leaders should critically pay attention to emotional intelligence of their followers and employ transformational tools to change the way they perceive their challenges. These tools may include further training, refresher courses, mentorship, and communication skills and provide opportunities for their growth. These will aid in influencing the followers to act towards conflict management and resolution.
- Workplaces should be able to integrate a diversity of ideas and backgrounds in order to harvest diverse perspectives through which collusion motivate change and development.
- Leaders should always explicitly encourage their followers through presentation of real values of projects under their control together with offering autonomy. This proffer freedom and the feeling of ownership of the process to conflict management and resolution.
- Conflict resolution training: Seek out conflict resolution training programmes that emphasize emotional intelligence competencies such as empathy, self-awareness, motivation and social skills for managing conflicts effectively.
- Reece (2022) assets that reframing is one of the most powerful skills that can be taught in an emotional intelligence training class. Reframing is the cognitive process of changing your frame of reference. Reframing a half-empty glass as half-full, in effect, changes your attitude about the situation. You can successfully frame any problem as an opportunity by expanding your frame to bring new possibilities into clear focus. By reframing conflict with a co-worker as an opportunity to build better teamwork with that person, you can find the motivation to initiate a conversation rather than avoid the conflict as unworkable. During a difficult conversation you can reframe the way you see the other person – not as an enemy, but rather a potential new ally. By reframing opportunities that that can be brought by the situation are identified.
- Emotional Intelligence training should be the cornerstone of any comprehensive conflict-management training program, and must result in reprogramming participants for high-EQ behaviour if organisations would like to beef up their emotional intelligence training.

CONCLUSION

If one is emotionally intelligence, conflicts are effectively managed hence resulting in peace, harmony and tranquillity. Conflict cannot be stopped from happening where there are two people but can be avoided and or limited to lesser extent. It cannot be erased but only be managed. Emotional Intelligence is the fluid and ability that enables people to manage conflict between and among them. Without this fluid and ability, conflicts will continue tearing relationships stifling progress. Emotional intelligence brings peace to oneself, the workplaces, homes, institutions, organisations and companies. Without it, managing conflict will always a thing the society will ever grapple with without an end.By cultivating emotional intelligence through self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, motivation and social skills, individuals can navigate conflicts more effectively, foster positive relationships and achieve successful outcomes in various settings.

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