

# The Role of Strategic Dialogue in Reducing Organizational Conflict

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**Abstract:** This study examines the role of strategic dialogue in reducing organizational conflict at Al-Mustansiriya University. Organizational conflict in academic institutions often arises from competing personal interests and insufficient engagement of top management in fostering constructive dialogue. To address this issue, the study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach based on data collected through a structured questionnaire. The study sample consisted of administrative and academic staff at different managerial levels. Out of 73 distributed questionnaires, 67 valid responses were obtained and analyzed using SPSS software. The analysis focuses on the dimensions of strategic dialogue (principles, process, and individuals) and their relationship with organizational conflict at multiple levels. The results indicate a significant negative relationship between strategic dialogue and organizational conflict, suggesting that more effective dialogue practices contribute to conflict reduction. Among the dimensions, principles and process show the strongest associations with organizational conflict, whereas the individual dimension demonstrates a weaker relationship. Regression analysis further reveals that strategic dialogue has a statistically significant effect on reducing organizational conflict, particularly at the organizational level, while its effects on self-conflict and individual-level conflict are not statistically significant. The findings emphasize the importance of structured and participatory dialogue processes in enhancing organizational harmony and mitigating conflict within academic institutions.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Strategic dialogue is an effective tool for negotiation and understanding between conflicting parties and can transform tense conflicts into agreed-upon solutions. This study aims to examine the importance of strategic dialogue in reducing organizational conflict at Al-Mustansiriya University. The data for this study were collected at Al-Mustansiriya University with the permission and administrative support of the university and the selected colleges. The authors are affiliated with Kut University College and Middle Technical University; however, access to the study site and participants was formally granted for the purposes of this research. In order to cover the current study and encompass all its aspects, it was structured into four axes: The first axis focused on the study methodology, the second axis dealt with the theoretical aspect of the study, the third axis focused on the practical aspect of the study, and the fourth axis came with the most important conclusions and recommendations.

### 1.1 Study Problem

Organizations' adoption of an interactive and purposeful approach enhances constructive discussion and addresses cases of competition and conflict between individuals, thereby limiting them. In light of this, and through repeated initial visits to Al-Mustansiriya University, observation, and initial interviews with those in positions of authority, the researcher sensed a problem that was effectively identified through the answers obtained from the initial exploratory study. Conflicts within the university environment represent this problem because some individuals think about personal interests. The researchers also noted a weakness - albeit to varying degrees - in the senior management's ability to promote constructive dialogue to confront conflicting viewpoints and thus reduce organizational conflict. Through the main problem, a set of questions emerges as follows:

- 1) What is the reality of interest in strategic dialogue and its dimensions at Al-Mustansiriya University?

- 2) What is the reality of organizational conflict and its dimensions at Al-Mustansiriya University?
- 3) Is there a statistically significant correlation between strategic dialogue and organizational conflict at Al-Mustansiriya University at the overall level and the level of dimensions?
- 4) Does strategic dialogue have a statistically significant effect on reducing organizational conflict at Al-Mustansiriya University at the overall level and the dimensions?

## 1.2 Importance of the Study

The importance of the study is as follows:

- 1) Providing a theoretical framework from the literature on the researched topics about strategic dialogue and its dimensions, as well as organizational conflict and its dimensions.
- 2) Directing the attention of Al-Mustansiriya University to the need to reconsider the strategic dialogue process, program it properly, and document it to benefit from it in reducing organizational conflict.
- 3) Testing the study's potential for strategic dialogue in reducing organizational conflict, which is characterized by a scarcity of Arab studies (within the study's limits).
- 4) The study will contribute to guiding Al-Mustansiriya University administrations to the sources of conflict within it, which requires focusing on and addressing them.
- 5) Attempting to change the reality of Al-Mustansiriya University in a way that elevates strategic dialogue and its effective role in reducing organizational conflict.

## 1.3 Study Objectives

The study objectives are represented by what it tries to achieve in terms of results and answering the questions of the problem from which it originated, as follows:

- 1) Diagnosing the reality of strategic dialogue and identifying the order of its dimensions according to their importance in Al-Mustansiriya University.
- 2) Diagnosing the reality of organizational conflict and identifying the order of its dimensions according to their importance in Al-Mustansiriya University.
- 3) Testing the existence of a correlation between strategic dialogue and organizational conflict in Al-Mustansiriya University at the overall level and the level of dimensions.
- 4) Determining the degree of influence of strategic dialogue on organizational conflict in Al-

Mustansiriya University at the overall level and the level of dimensions.

## 1.4 Study Hypotheses

The study hypotheses consisted of two main hypotheses as follows:

- The first primary hypothesis. (There is a statistically significant correlation between strategic dialogue and organizational conflict overall and at the level of dimensions in Al-Mustansiriya University).
- The second primary hypothesis. (There is a statistically significant effect of strategic dialogue (overall and at the level of dimensions) on organizational conflict at Al-Mustansiriya University).

## 1.5 Study Limitations

The study limitations were as follows:

- Scientific limitations. Represented by the study variables (strategic dialogue) and its dimensions, and (organizational conflict) and its dimensions.
- Spatial limitations. Al-Mustansiriya University and its affiliated colleges were selected next to the university presidency headquarters. These are three colleges with their departments: the College of Arts, the College of Sciences, and the College of Education.
- Time limitations. The study period was extended from (18/12/2023) to (29/4/2024) in both its theoretical and practical aspects.
- Human limitations. Included all levels of management at Al-Mustansiriya University.

# 2 THE THEORETICAL ASPECT OF THE STUDY

## 2.1 Strategic Dialogue

Strategic dialogue is more than just a traditional communication channel through which information and data about decisions are disseminated. Instead, it is the tool through which vision is formulated, and strategic decisions are made and implemented [1]. Through strategic dialogue, the mental model expands, and the decision-maker becomes capable of understanding work environment signals and forming scenarios about the future by creating future memory that enhances elements of purpose and means [2]. It is a purposeful interactive approach that promotes

open and constructive discussion of conflicting viewpoints on what is positive and negative about various strategic issues to generate shared meaning and understanding that serves the organization's interest, achieves its strategic goals, and employs high-quality thinking power in the strategy formulation process, and generates strategic alternatives in more effective and creative ways [3]. Strategic Dialogue Strategies [4], [5]. There are four strategic dialogue strategies:

- Consensual dialogue strategy. Used to facilitate consensus building in opinions and agreement among dialogue participants regarding strategy or organizational behaviour practices to create agreement on various topics and develop relationships based on a shared mission in a way that directs organizational messages towards creating converging opinions and perspectives [6].
- Transformative dialogue strategy calls for organizations to assume new assumptions and ideas regarding implementing their current strategy and policy to create knowledge through an inside-out approach. Organizations should stimulate participants' self-expression and allow them to express and share their ideas and feelings by creating a participatory environment that enables them to analyze organizational issues and topics from different perspectives to create new suggestions and values [7].
- Dialogue framing strategy. Organizations choose topics to be visible and recognized as important to stakeholders. All organizations participate in societal dialogue, aiming to interact with stakeholders to transfer and focus the dialogue from one topic to another and reduce the importance of the important topic.
- Generative dialogue strategy. Participants exchange opinions while respecting other viewpoints. Organizations recognize the existence of different perspectives but do not necessarily want to modify their opinions or positions. Generative dialogue promotes more trust, openness toward interlocutors, and reciprocity in control [8].

Seven strategic dialogue strategies, as follows [9], [10]:

- Recognition dialogue strategy. This strategy acknowledges the existence of other creative ideas that support or develop the proposed new ideas and sometimes oppose them.
- Open dialogue strategy. Used to be open to other viewpoints and cooperate with their proponents.
- Inquiry dialogue strategy. This is conducted through an open dialogue on all viewpoints

more collaboratively. Anticipatory rejection strategy: This involves generating a prior scenario about the opposition and objection the interlocutor might face when dialoguing.

- Direct appeal to participants strategy. Done by taking participants' opinions and listening to their suggestions.
- Dialogue venting strategy. This strategy is used when the discussion reaches a sterile stage, and the interlocutors do not accept each other's opinions. It absorbs tension and calls for rethinking and consensual solutions, though it may not be able to, and the dialogue continues with rejection. Ambiguous dialogue strategy: In which the interlocutors ambiguously generate dialogue in the form of a puzzle or humorous way, or use emojis or resort to stories or scenarios to convey their idea.

## 2.2 Organizational Conflict

Organizational conflict is a natural and inevitable phenomenon in modern organizations, arising from differences in values, interests, perceptions, and goals among individuals and groups. It can be defined as a process in which one party perceives that another party has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect, something that the first party cares about.

Conflict within organizations may occur at different levels, including self-conflict (intrapersonal conflict), interpersonal conflict (between individuals), and organizational-level conflict (between groups or departments). Each level reflects different sources and dynamics of conflict, ranging from internal psychological tension to structural and functional disagreements within the organization.

Scholars have emphasized that organizational conflict is not necessarily negative; rather, it can have both constructive and destructive outcomes. Constructive conflict may enhance creativity, improve decision-making quality, and stimulate critical thinking. In contrast, unmanaged or excessive conflict may lead to reduced performance, communication breakdown, and deterioration of organizational relationships.

The causes of organizational conflict are diverse and include limited resources, role ambiguity, differences in values and attitudes, poor communication, and lack of coordination between organizational units. In academic institutions, conflict is often intensified by differences in professional backgrounds, autonomy of faculty members, and competing administrative and academic priorities.

Effective conflict management requires the adoption of appropriate strategies, such as communication, negotiation, collaboration, and dialogue. In this context, strategic dialogue plays a

crucial role as a mechanism for reducing misunderstandings, aligning perspectives, and transforming conflict into a constructive force that supports organizational development.

### 3 PRACTICAL ASPECT

#### 3.1 Analysis of the Study Sample's Responses to the Independent Variable (Strategic Dialogue)

This section presents a descriptive analysis of the respondents' perceptions of the independent variable, strategic dialogue, and its main dimensions.

Table 1 reports the results for the principles dimension at Al-Mustansiriya University. The overall mean score is 3.04, indicating a moderate level of agreement among respondents. Item means range from 2.51 to 3.64, while standard deviation values range from 0.667 to 0.946, suggesting considerable variability in responses.

Table 2 summarizes the results for the process dimension. The overall mean score is 3.08, reflecting a moderate level of agreement. Item means vary between 2.49 and 3.85, and standard deviations range from 0.545 to 0.958, again indicating noticeable dispersion in respondents' views.

As shown in Table 3, the overall mean score for the individual dimension is 2.92, which also corresponds to a moderate level of agreement. Item means range from 2.22 to 3.54, while standard deviation values range from 0.714 to 1.072, indicating relatively high variability among respondents. The findings reveal variability in responses across items, as reflected in the distribution of mean values and standard deviations.

Table 4 shows correlations between the independent variable dimensions (principles X1, process X2, individuals X3, and overall strategic dialogue X) and the dependent variable dimensions (self-conflict Y1, individual-level conflict Y2, organizational-level conflict Y3, and overall organizational conflict Y). Significant negative correlations (\*\* $p < 0.01$ ) were found between X1, X2, X and Y3 (organizational-level conflict) and Y (overall conflict), ranging from -0.707 to -0.719. Correlations with Y1 and Y2 were weaker and non-significant.  $N=67$ .

Overall, the results indicate that strategic dialogue is perceived at a moderate level across all dimensions (principles, process, and individual). The observed variability in responses suggests differences in respondents' perceptions, which may be attributed to varying levels of awareness, experience, or

engagement with strategic dialogue practices within the university context.

#### 3.2 Analysis of the Study Sample's Responses to the Dependent Variable (Organizational Conflict)

This section presents a descriptive analysis of respondents' perceptions of the dependent variable, organizational conflict, and its dimensions at Al-Mustansiriya University. Table 5 reports the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), regression coefficient ( $\beta$ ), constant term ( $\alpha$ ), t-value, F-value, significance level ( $p$ ), and the nature of the relationship for each dependent variable. Strategic dialogue explains 42.1% of the variance in organizational-level conflict and 23.5% of the variance in overall organizational conflict (both significant at  $p < 0.05$ ). Effects on self-conflict and individual-level conflict are not statistically significant.

According to Table 6, the overall mean value for the self-conflict dimension is 2.74, indicating a moderate level of agreement, with item means ranging from 2.04 to 3.42. The standard deviation values for the items ranged from 0.475 to 1.086, suggesting a relatively high level of dispersion in the responses. The variation in percentages further indicates noticeable differences among participants' responses.

#### 3.3 Individual-Level Conflict

Table 7 summarizes the results for the individual-level conflict dimension at Al-Mustansiriya University. The overall mean score is 3.33, indicating a moderate level of agreement among respondents.

Item mean values range from 2.94 (Q7) to 4.06 (Q9), suggesting noticeable variation in the intensity of perceived conflict at the individual level. The highest mean score (Q9 = 4.06) reflects relatively stronger agreement on specific aspects of interpersonal conflict, whereas the lowest mean score (Q7 = 2.94) indicates comparatively lower agreement.

Standard deviation values range from 0.475 to 1.086, pointing to a relatively high dispersion in responses. This variability suggests differences in respondents' experiences and perceptions of individual-level conflict within the university.

Overall, the findings indicate that individual-level conflict is present at a moderate level, with varying degrees of perception among participants. This variation may be attributed to differences in roles, interpersonal interactions, and professional responsibilities within the organizational context.

Table 1: Principles dimension of strategic dialogue.

T	Paragraphs	Mean	Standard Deviation	Coefficient of Variation %	Sequence
1	Q1	2.97	0.937	31.5	Eleventh
2	Q2	2.64	0.883	33.4	Twelfth
3	Q3	2.51	0.746	29.7	Eighth
4	Q4	2.43	0.946	27.6	Sixth
5	Q5	2.31	0.891	26.9	Fifth
6	Q6	2.57	0.891	34.7	Fourteenth
7	Q7	2.64	0.773	29.3	Seventh
8	Q8	2.52	0.785	22.3	Second
9	Q9	2.06	0.886	29.0	Sixth
10	Q10	2.69	0.857	31.9	Tenth
11	Q11	3.45	0.803	23.3	Third
12	Q12	2.70	0.905	33.5	Thirteenth
13	Q13	3.40	0.854	25.1	Fourth
14	Q14	3.64	0.667	18.3	First
X1	Principles	3.04	0.845	27.8	n=67

Table 2: Process dimension of strategic dialogue.

T	Paragraphs	Mean	Standard Deviation	Coef. Variation %	Sequence
1	Q1	3.85	0.634	16.5	Second
2	Q2	3.49	0.704	20.2	Third
3	Q3	3.72	0.545	14.7	First
4	Q4	2.60	0.799	30.7	Seventh
5	Q5	2.93	0.958	32.7	Eleventh
6	Q6	3.30	0.905	27.4	Fifth
7	Q7	2.66	0.845	31.8	Tenth
8	Q8	3.30	0.921	27.9	Sixth
9	Q9	3.37	0.918	27.2	Fourth
10	Q10	2.58	0.819	31.7	Ninth
11	Q11	2.64	0.883	33.4	Twelfth
12	Q12	2.49	0.786	31.6	Eighth
X2	The process	3.08	0.810	16.5	n=67

Table 3: Individuals dimension of strategic dialogue.

T	Paragraphs	Mean	Standard Deviation	Coef. Variation %	Sequence
1	Q1	3.18	1.072	33.7	Eighth
2	Q2	2.57	0.783	30.5	Fourth
3	Q3	2.88	0.946	32.8	Seventh
4	Q4	3.43	0.839	24.5	Third
5	Q5	3.34	0.808	24.2	Second
6	Q6	2.69	0.925	34.4	Tenth
7	Q7	2.76	0.939	34.0	Ninth
8	Q8	3.54	0.804	22.7	First
9	Q9	2.82	0.903	32.0	Fifth
10	Q10	2.22	0.714	32.2	Sixth
X3	Individuals	2.92	0.886	30.3	n=67

Table 4: Correlation matrix (strategic dialogue and organizational conflict).

The dependent variable, the independent variable	Y1 Self-conflict	Y2 Individual-level conflict	Y3 Organizational-level conflict	Y Organizational conflict
Principles X1	0.265-	0.251-	0.719-**	0.712-**
Process X2	0.203-	0.228-	0.717-**	0.710-**
Individuals X3	0.253-	0.156	0.251-	0.227-
Strategic dialogue X	0.264-	0.215-	0.712-**	0.709-**

Table 5: Results of the impact of strategic dialogue on organizational conflict and its dimensions.

Independent variable	Coefficient of determination R <sup>2</sup>	Regression coefficient β	Constant Term α	Calculated t-value	Calculated F-value	Significance Level P	Nature of the relationship
Self-conflict	R <sup>2</sup>	-0.229	3.427	1.431	2.049	0.157	Intangible
Individual-level conflict	R <sup>2</sup>	-0.055	3.491	0.359	0.129	0.721	Intangible
Organizational-level conflict	R <sup>2</sup>	-0.421	4.181	*2.614	*6.830	0.011	Tangible
Organizational conflict	R <sup>2</sup>	-0.235	3.699	*2.479	*6.143	0.016	Tangible

Table 6: Self-conflict dimension (intrapersonal conflict).

T	Paragraphs	Mean	Standard Deviation	Coefficient Variation %	Sequence
1	Q1	2.34	0.880	37.6	Ninth
2	Q2	2.49	0.859	34.5	Fourth
3	Q3	3.13	0.936	29.9	Third
4	Q4	2.82	1.086	38.5	Seventh
5	Q5	2.93	1.049	35.8	Eighth
6	Q6	2.73	0.963	35.3	Sixth
7	Q7	2.04	0.475	23.3	Second
8	Q8	2.73	0.947	34.7	Fifth
9	Q9	3.42	0.721	21.1	First
Y1	Inner conflict	2.74	0.880	32.1	n=67

Table 7: Individual-level conflict dimension.

T	Paragraphs	Mean	Standard Deviation	Coefficient Variation %	Sequence
1	Q1	3.01	0.880	29.2	First
2	Q2	3.18	0.859	27.0	Third
3	Q3	3.18	0.936	29.4	Seventh
4	Q4	3.57	1.086	30.4	Eighth
5	Q5	3.66	1.049	28.7	Fourth
6	Q6	3.05	0.963	31.6	Ninth
7	Q7	2.94	0.475	16.2	First
8	Q8	3.30	0.947	28.7	Fifth
9	Q9	4.06	0.721	17.8	Second
Y2	Conflict at individual level	3.33	0.880	26.4	n=67

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

The study provides empirical evidence on the role of strategic dialogue in shaping organizational conflict within Al-Mustansiriya University.

The findings indicate that strategic dialogue is practiced at a moderate level across its key dimensions (principles, process, and individuals). However, several structural and procedural limitations reduce its effectiveness. In particular, unstructured dialogue processes and the absence of clear frameworks limit participants' ability to generate new knowledge and develop shared understanding.

The results also reveal that, although participants demonstrate a serious and comprehensive approach to dialogue, differences in ethical and cultural values between faculty members and institutional norms contribute to divergence in perspectives and may intensify conflict.

From an organizational perspective, the university administration shows a tendency to adopt compromise-based approaches by listening to conflicting parties. This contributes to reducing conflict intensity, especially at the organizational level. However, weak coordination and integration between departments remain a significant source of conflict escalation, as problems in one unit often propagate across the organization.

Furthermore, the study highlights that strategic dialogue has a stronger impact on reducing conflict at the organizational level compared to self-conflict and interpersonal conflict. This suggests that collective dialogue mechanisms are more effective when addressing systemic issues rather than individual-level tensions.

Finally, the effectiveness of dialogue committees and teams appears limited due to unclear formation criteria and insufficient accountability. Strengthening these structures, along with improving coordination mechanisms and formalizing dialogue processes, is essential for enhancing the role of strategic dialogue in conflict management.

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