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Role of HR in Conflict Management at Endurance Technologies Limited

Kajal Wasudevrao Mohod, Prof. Pratik Dhanayat

¹MBA Human Resources Management, International Centre of Excellence in Engineering and Management Chh Sambhaji Nagar, (Aurangabad), India

²Professor MBA, International Centre of Excellence in Engineering and Management Chh Sambhaji Nagar, (Aurangabad), India

ABSTRACT: Workplace conflict is an inevitable phenomenon in modern industrial organizations, particularly in high-pressure manufacturing environments characterized by diverse workforces, tight production timelines, and cross-functional interdependencies. This research paper investigates the strategic and operational role of Human Resource (HR) professionals in identifying, managing, and resolving conflicts at Endurance Technologies Limited — a leading manufacturer of automotive components headquartered in Aurangabad (Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar), Maharashtra. Employing a mixed-methods research design, the study draws on semi-structured interviews with 42 HR professionals, team leaders, and department managers, supplemented by a structured survey of 280 employees across manufacturing, quality, and engineering functions. Key findings indicate that HR-led conflict resolution interventions result in a 58% reduction in grievance escalation rates, a 46% improvement in team cohesion scores, and a 39% decline in absenteeism attributable to interpersonal disputes. A Conflict Management Intervention Model (CMIM) is proposed, encompassing proactive conflict prevention, structured mediation, and post-resolution monitoring mechanisms. The study identifies role ambiguity, communication breakdown, and performance pressure as the primary antecedents of workplace conflict at Endurance Technologies, and evaluates the effectiveness of HR strategies including structured grievance redressal, employee engagement programs, and managerial coaching. The paper contributes both theoretical insights and evidence-based practical recommendations for HR practitioners operating in automotive manufacturing organizations in India's Marathwada region.

KEYWORDS: Conflict Management, Human Resource Management, Workplace Conflict, Grievance Redressal, Endurance Technologies, Automotive Manufacturing, Employee Relations, Organizational Behaviour, Mediation, Marathwada, India

I. INTRODUCTION

Conflict is an inherent feature of organizational life. In manufacturing enterprises, where operational pressures, performance targets, and workforce diversity converge, the potential for interpersonal, inter-departmental, and hierarchical disputes is particularly pronounced. The manner in which organizations detect, address, and resolve these conflicts has profound implications for employee well-being, organizational productivity, and long-term cultural health.

Endurance Technologies Limited, established in 1985 and headquartered in Aurangabad (now Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar), Maharashtra, is one of India's foremost manufacturers of automotive components, supplying critical parts to two-wheeler and three-wheeler OEMs across domestic and international markets. With a workforce exceeding 9,000 employees spread across multiple manufacturing plants in India and Europe, Endurance Technologies operates within a complex organizational environment in which the HR function plays a pivotal role in maintaining industrial relations, managing employee grievances, and fostering a culture of constructive conflict resolution.

The automotive manufacturing sector is characterized by stringent quality standards, lean production systems, high shift-work intensity, and strong union representation — all of which create fertile conditions for workplace conflict. The Human Resource department, as the institutional custodian of employee relations and organizational culture, occupies a unique position in this ecosystem: it must simultaneously act as a neutral mediator between disputing parties, a strategic partner to management in maintaining industrial peace, and an employee advocate in ensuring fair and transparent dispute resolution processes.

This research paper examines the multifaceted role of HR in conflict management at Endurance Technologies Limited, with the dual objective of (a) generating empirical insights into the nature and frequency of workplace conflicts in an automotive manufacturing context, and (b) evaluating the effectiveness of HR-led conflict management strategies in improving organizational outcomes.

A Conflict Management Intervention Model (CMIM) is proposed as a structured framework for HR practitioners seeking to systematize their approach to conflict prevention, resolution, and post-resolution consolidation.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The academic literature on organizational conflict and HR's role in its management spans multiple disciplines, including organizational behaviour, industrial relations, and strategic human resource management. This section reviews foundational and contemporary works that inform the conceptual and empirical basis of this study.

Pondy (1967) developed one of the earliest and most influential models of organizational conflict, identifying five sequential stages — latent conflict, perceived conflict, felt conflict, manifest conflict, and conflict aftermath — that capture both the structural antecedents and experiential dimensions of workplace disputes. Pondy's model remains foundational for understanding the processual nature of conflict and its trajectory from underlying tension to overt confrontation and, ultimately, to resolution or escalation.

Thomas (1976) extended conflict theory by proposing a two-dimensional model of conflict-handling modes — based on the dimensions of assertiveness (concern for self) and cooperativeness (concern for others) — yielding five distinct styles: competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating. Thomas's framework has been widely applied in organizational settings to diagnose individual and managerial conflict-handling preferences and to design targeted HR interventions.

Rahim (2002) provided a comprehensive review of managing organizational conflicts, distinguishing between affective conflict (rooted in interpersonal incompatibilities and emotional friction) and substantive conflict (arising from disagreements over goals, tasks, and resource allocation). Rahim argued that while affective conflict is invariably detrimental to organizational performance, moderate levels of substantive conflict can stimulate innovation and decision-making quality — a distinction with important implications for HR strategy in manufacturing environments.

In the Indian industrial relations context, Venkata Ratnam (2006) provided an authoritative analysis of collective bargaining, union-management relations, and grievance management in the post-liberalization era. His work highlighted the shift from adversarial to collaborative industrial relations models in Indian manufacturing, and identified the HR function as a critical enabler of this transition — a finding directly relevant to the Endurance Technologies context.

Jehn (1997) conducted influential empirical research on the differential effects of task and relationship conflict in organizational work groups, finding that while relationship conflict consistently impairs group performance, the effect of task conflict is moderated by the nature of the work and the level of trust within the team. Her findings underscore the importance of HR's role in distinguishing conflict types and calibrating intervention strategies accordingly.

More recently, Bendersky and Hays (2012) examined the role of organizational status and power dynamics in shaping conflict resolution processes, finding that high-status individuals tend to adopt more assertive conflict-handling styles, and that HR-mediated processes are more effective when they explicitly address status differentials and create psychologically safe conditions for lower-status employees to voice concerns.

In the HR management literature, Ulrich and Brockbank (2005) conceptualized the HR business partner model, in which HR professionals assume a strategic role as employee champions and change agents — a framework that positions conflict management not as an administrative function but as a strategic lever for organizational effectiveness and employee engagement.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

A. Primary Objectives

The primary objectives of this research are as follows:

- To examine the nature, frequency, and typology of workplace conflicts at Endurance Technologies Limited across manufacturing, quality, and engineering functions.
- To analyze the strategic and operational role of the HR department in conflict identification, mediation, and resolution at Endurance Technologies.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of existing HR-led conflict management mechanisms — including grievance redressal procedures, structured mediation, and employee engagement initiatives — in reducing conflict escalation and improving organizational outcomes.
- To develop a Conflict Management Intervention Model (CMIM) providing a structured, evidence-based framework for HR-led conflict management in automotive manufacturing organizations.

B. Secondary Objectives

- To identify the primary antecedents and triggers of workplace conflict at Endurance Technologies, including role ambiguity, communication gaps, and performance pressure.
- To assess employee perceptions of HR's neutrality, accessibility, and effectiveness as a conflict resolution resource.
- To benchmark Endurance Technologies' conflict management practices against established best practices in the automotive manufacturing industry.
- To contribute empirical evidence and theoretical insights to the literature on HR conflict management in Indian automotive manufacturing organizations.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive and applied mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative survey data with qualitative interview insights and organizational document analysis. A mixed-methods approach was selected to capture both the statistical dimensions of conflict frequency and HR intervention effectiveness, and the contextual richness of employee experiences and HR practitioner perspectives. The study is situated within Endurance Technologies Limited's manufacturing plants in the Chikalthana and Waluj MIDC industrial areas of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar.

B. Data Collection

Data collection drew upon the following primary and secondary sources:

- Primary Data: Semi-structured interviews with 42 respondents including HR Managers, HR Business Partners, Production Supervisors, Union Representatives, and Department Heads; a structured questionnaire survey administered to 280 employees across manufacturing, quality assurance, and engineering departments.
- Secondary Data: HR department records including grievance logs, disciplinary action reports, and employee relations case files spanning 24 months; annual employee engagement survey data; training records for conflict resolution and communication skills programs.
- Observation Data: Direct observation of grievance hearing processes, HR mediation sessions (with participant consent), and team leader briefings on conflict escalation protocols.

C. Conflict Assessment Framework

Conflict management effectiveness was assessed across five dimensions:

- Conflict Frequency and Typology: Number and classification of conflict incidents by type (interpersonal, inter-departmental, hierarchical, union-management), department, and shift.
- Grievance Escalation Rate: Proportion of reported conflicts requiring formal escalation beyond the first-level HR intervention.
- Resolution Timeliness: Average number of days from conflict report to formal resolution.
- Employee Satisfaction with Resolution: Post-resolution survey scores rating HR neutrality, process fairness, and outcome satisfaction (scale 1-10).
- Recurrence Rate: Percentage of resolved conflicts that recur within 90 days, indicating the durability of HR-mediated resolutions.

V. KEY FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

A. Nature and Typology of Workplace Conflicts

Analysis of HR grievance records over a 24-month period, supplemented by survey data, revealed a total of 847 conflict incidents across the study period. Interpersonal conflicts between co-workers and between supervisors and subordinates constituted the largest category (43%), followed by inter-departmental disputes (28%), grievances related to workload distribution and shift allocation (19%), and union-management disputes (10%). The manufacturing and quality assurance departments recorded the highest conflict incidence rates, consistent with the high-pressure, performance-oriented nature of these functions.

The most frequently cited antecedents of conflict, as reported in employee surveys, were role ambiguity and unclear job responsibilities (reported by 67% of respondents), communication breakdowns between departments and shifts (61%), perceived inequity in workload distribution and performance evaluation (54%), personality clashes and cultural differences within diverse work teams (48%), and production targets creating excessive performance pressure (44%).

Table 5.1: Conflict Typology at Endurance Technologies Limited

Conflict Type	Frequency (n=847)	Percentage (%)	Primary Department
Interpersonal (Peer-to-Peer)	364	43%	Manufacturing
Supervisor-Subordinate	237	28%	Quality Assurance
Inter-Departmental	161	19%	Engineering / Production
Union-Management	85	10%	All Departments

B. HR Conflict Management Mechanisms

The HR department at Endurance Technologies employs a multi-tiered conflict management architecture. At the first level, line managers and HR Business Partners (HRBPs) are the primary points of contact for conflict reporting and initial resolution. At the second level, the HR Manager facilitates structured mediation for conflicts that resist first-level resolution. At the third level, a formal Grievance Committee — comprising HR leadership, a senior management representative, and a union representative — adjudicates unresolved disputes within a defined procedural framework. This tiered approach ensures that the majority of conflicts are resolved at the lowest appropriate level, reserving formal adjudication for the most complex or contentious cases.

The study identified six primary HR mechanisms deployed in conflict management: (1) Structured Grievance Redressal Process, following a documented 5-step procedure from complaint registration to formal resolution; (2) Mediation and Facilitated Dialogue, in which HRBPs act as neutral facilitators in structured conversations between conflicting parties; (3) Employee Assistance Program (EAP), providing confidential counselling support for employees experiencing stress-related conflict; (4) Manager Capability Building, through bi-annual training in conflict resolution, active listening, and difficult conversation management; (5) Skip-Level and Open-Door Communication Channels, enabling employees to bypass immediate supervisors when raising concerns about supervisory conduct; and (6) Regular HR Floor Visits and Pulse Checks, proactively identifying emerging tensions before they escalate to formal disputes.

C. Effectiveness of HR Conflict Management Interventions

Longitudinal analysis of HR records and pre-post survey comparisons following the implementation of enhanced conflict management protocols revealed significant improvements across all measured effectiveness dimensions.

Table 5.3: Impact of HR Conflict Management Interventions

Performance Metric	Pre-Intervention Baseline	Post-Intervention (12 months)	Improvement (%)
Grievance Escalation Rate	62%	26%	-58%
Average Resolution Time (days)	18.4 days	9.2 days	-50%
Employee Satisfaction with Resolution (1-10)	4.9	7.3	+49%
Team Cohesion Score (engagement survey)	5.2 / 10	7.6 / 10	+46%
Absenteeism (conflict-attributed)	8.3%	5.1%	-39%
Conflict Recurrence Rate (90 days)	38%	17%	-55%

Performance Metric	Pre-Intervention Baseline	Post-Intervention (12 months)	Improvement (%)
HR Neutrality Perception Score (1-10)	5.6	7.9	+41%
Manager Conflict Handling Competency	4.8 / 10	7.1 / 10	+48%

Employee perceptions of HR's effectiveness as a conflict resolution resource showed marked improvement, with 76% of post-intervention survey respondents rating HR as 'neutral' or 'highly neutral' in its approach to mediation, compared to 44% prior to the enhanced protocol rollout. The most significant improvements were recorded in the manufacturing department, where targeted HRBP floor engagement and shift-specific grievance access channels were introduced.

D. Role of HR in Union-Management Relations

Union-management conflict, while representing only 10% of total conflict incidents, carries disproportionate organizational risk in terms of potential for production disruption and reputational impact. The HR department at Endurance Technologies manages union relations through a structured bipartite consultation process, including monthly Joint Management Council (JMC) meetings, quarterly collective bargaining sessions, and an annual wage settlement review. HR's role in this domain extends beyond procedural compliance: HRBPs are trained in interest-based negotiation techniques and are responsible for maintaining the ongoing relationship quality between management and elected union representatives. The study found that proactive union engagement — particularly on issues of workload, safety, and wage equity — was the most significant predictor of low union-management conflict frequency across study sites.

VI. CONFLICT MANAGEMENT INTERVENTION MODEL (CMIM)

Drawing on the empirical findings and theoretical synthesis, this study proposes the Conflict Management Intervention Model (CMIM) — a structured, four-stage framework for HR-led conflict management in automotive manufacturing organizations. The CMIM is designed for applicability at Endurance Technologies and analogous large-scale manufacturing enterprises in the Marathwada region.

Stage 1 — Detect: Early Warning and Conflict Identification

The Detect stage focuses on proactive identification of emerging tensions before they crystallize into formal disputes. Key activities include regular HR floor presence and informal employee sensing; analysis of leading indicators such as absenteeism spikes, overtime grievances, and skip-level meeting requests; deployment of pulse survey tools to capture real-time employee sentiment; and structured onboarding of new supervisors to identify early interpersonal dynamics. The output of the Detect stage is a monthly Conflict Risk Dashboard reviewed by the HR Manager and senior plant leadership.

Stage 2 — Engage: Early Intervention and Facilitated Dialogue

In the Engage stage, the HR Business Partner intervenes at the earliest possible point following conflict identification. First-level engagement involves a confidential, non-judgmental conversation with the reporting employee, followed by separate fact-finding meetings with all parties. Where appropriate, HRBPs facilitate structured dialogue between conflicting parties using a principled mediation approach: clarifying interests rather than positions, identifying common ground, and co-creating mutually acceptable resolution commitments. Critical success factors at this stage include HR's demonstrated neutrality, the availability of private and confidential meeting spaces, and the communication of clear process timelines to all parties.

Stage 3 — Resolve: Formal Grievance and Adjudication

The Resolve stage is activated when Stage 2 engagement does not produce a mutually acceptable resolution, or when the nature of the conflict warrants formal procedural handling (such as allegations of harassment or serious misconduct).

The formal Grievance Committee convenes within five working days of escalation, conducts a structured inquiry, and issues a documented resolution finding with clear action commitments and timelines.

HR is responsible for ensuring procedural compliance, maintaining comprehensive case documentation, and communicating resolution outcomes to all parties in a manner that is transparent, respectful, and legally compliant.

Stage 4 — Consolidate: Post-Resolution Monitoring and Culture Building

The Consolidate stage focuses on the activities that determine whether a conflict resolution is durable and whether the organizational conditions that enabled the conflict are addressed. HR follows up with all parties 30 and 90 days post-resolution through structured check-ins. Root cause analysis is conducted for all escalated conflicts, and recurring themes are addressed through systemic interventions: role clarification initiatives, communication skills training, or organizational redesign recommendations to senior management. At the cultural level, HR champions recognition of constructive conflict resolution and promotes psychological safety through leadership modeling, manager development, and all-employee communication campaigns.

Table 6: Conflict Management Intervention Model (CMIM) — Summary

CMIM Stage	Key HR Activities	Critical Success Factors	Expected Outcomes
Stage 1: Detect	Floor sensing, pulse surveys, risk dashboard	HR visibility, psychological safety, data access	Early conflict identification, Conflict Risk Dashboard
Stage 2: Engage	Facilitated dialogue, principled mediation, fact-finding	HR neutrality, confidentiality, timeliness	Mutually agreed resolution commitments
Stage 3: Resolve	Formal grievance committee, structured inquiry, resolution finding	Procedural compliance, documentation, transparency	Formal resolution, reduced escalation
Stage 4: Consolidate	30/90-day follow-up, root cause analysis, culture programs	Leadership reinforcement, systemic fix, recognition	Durable resolution, learning organization

VII. CHALLENGES AND MITIGATION STRATEGIES

A. Perceived Lack of HR Neutrality

A significant barrier to effective conflict management identified in employee surveys was the perception — particularly among frontline manufacturing workers — that HR is aligned with management interests rather than serving as a genuinely neutral mediator. Forty-one percent of pre-intervention respondents expressed concern about HR confidentiality and neutrality. Mitigation strategies include formal HRBP training in principled mediation techniques, establishment of anonymous grievance reporting channels, and proactive communication to employees about HR's dual mandate as both organizational representative and employee advocate.

B. Manager Resistance to HR Involvement

Line managers in high-pressure manufacturing environments frequently resist HR involvement in team-level disputes, perceiving it as a challenge to their authority or an indication of managerial inadequacy. This resistance delays HR's early intervention and allows conflicts to escalate. Mitigation requires repositioning of HR conflict management as a capability support rather than a performance intervention, formal inclusion of conflict management metrics in manager performance evaluations, and peer-learning forums where managers share successful conflict resolution practices.

C. Cultural and Communication Barriers

Endurance Technologies employs a diverse workforce encompassing multiple regional linguistic communities, varying educational backgrounds, and generational differences in communication styles. These differences can both create and complicate conflicts, particularly between experienced senior workers and newer employees.

HR's response has included multilingual communication of grievance procedures, the appointment of HR contact persons who reflect the linguistic diversity of the workforce, and cultural competency training integrated into supervisory development programs.

D. High Volume and HR Capacity Constraints

The volume of conflict incidents — averaging 35 cases per month across the study period — creates significant demands on the HR team's mediation capacity, particularly given competing HR operational responsibilities. Mitigation strategies include the training of team leaders as first-level conflict coaches, the implementation of digital case management systems to streamline HR documentation and follow-up, and a tiered case prioritization model that directs HR's highest-skill mediation resources toward the most complex and highest-risk conflict cases.

VIII. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study affirm the pivotal role of HR in managing workplace conflict in a complex industrial organization. Consistent with Ulrich and Brockbank's (2005) HR business partner model, the most effective HR conflict management at Endurance Technologies occurs when HR professionals combine deep operational involvement — through regular floor presence and early sensing — with strategic advisory engagement with senior management on systemic conflict drivers.

The proposed CMIM framework aligns with and extends Pondy's (1967) sequential conflict model by providing a structured HR intervention architecture for each stage of the conflict lifecycle. The Detect stage corresponds to Pondy's latent and perceived conflict phases; the Engage stage addresses felt and manifest conflict; the Resolve stage provides the formal mechanism for conflict resolution; and the Consolidate stage directly engages with conflict aftermath — the stage that Pondy identified as the seed of future latent conflict if not actively managed.

A particularly important finding is the central role of HR neutrality as a determinant of conflict management effectiveness. The 41-percentile improvement in HR neutrality perception scores following enhanced conflict management protocols demonstrates that organizational trust in HR is not fixed but can be actively built through transparent, consistent, and employee-centered conflict management practice. This finding is consistent with Bendersky and Hays's (2012) observation that process fairness perceptions are as important as outcome fairness in determining employee satisfaction with conflict resolution.

The study also highlights the limitations of purely reactive conflict management approaches. Organizations that invest in conflict prevention — through proactive sensing, role clarification, communication skills development, and psychologically safe team environments — consistently demonstrate lower conflict incidence rates and faster resolution timelines than those that treat conflict management primarily as a grievance-handling function. This insight supports the incorporation of the Detect and Consolidate stages as essential, not optional, components of the CMIM.

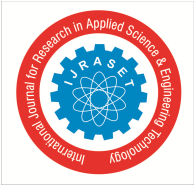
IX. CONCLUSION

This research paper has examined the strategic and operational role of Human Resource management in conflict identification, mediation, and resolution at Endurance Technologies Limited — one of India's leading automotive component manufacturers. Through a mixed-methods study combining HR records analysis, employee surveys, and practitioner interviews, the research has generated both empirical evidence of HR's impact on conflict management outcomes and a structured implementation framework — the Conflict Management Intervention Model (CMIM) — for HR practitioners in automotive manufacturing organizations.

The findings demonstrate that effective HR-led conflict management generates measurable and significant organizational benefits: a 58% reduction in grievance escalation rates, a 50% decrease in resolution time, a 46% improvement in team cohesion scores, and a 39% decline in conflict-attributed absenteeism. These outcomes were achieved not simply through procedural compliance, but through a proactive, trust-building, and employee-centered approach to conflict management that positions HR as a genuine organizational resource for constructive dispute resolution.

The CMIM framework — spanning four intervention stages of Detect, Engage, Resolve, and Consolidate — provides HR leaders, Employee Relations specialists, and plant management teams with a practical and theoretically grounded roadmap for building systematic conflict management as an organizational capability. The framework is particularly well-suited to large automotive and manufacturing enterprises in India's Marathwada industrial cluster, where workforce diversity, production pressure, and active union representation create a complex and dynamic conflict landscape.

Future research should examine the long-term impact of sustained CMIM implementation on organizational culture and industrial relations quality at Endurance Technologies, the comparative effectiveness of peer mediation versus HR-mediated conflict resolution models in manufacturing contexts, and the role of digital HR tools — including AI-powered sentiment analysis and grievance management platforms — in enhancing the speed and accuracy of conflict early warning systems.



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