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Procedural Justice and Negotiation in Day-to-Day Interactions Between Leaders and Subordinates

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Abstract

This article develops a normative account of conflict and negotiation within leader subordinate relations in everyday organizational life. It explains how interest disputes arise from asymmetric authority, contested fairness, and the distribution of time, information, workload, and recognition. Subordinate resistance is treated as relational communication that may signal unsafe voice conditions, insufficient support for demanded outputs, or perceived misuse of evaluative power. Negotiation is framed as a legitimacy building process that can realign authority and responsibility when it meets procedural fairness, reason giving, dignity protection, and verifiable follow up. The discussion distinguishes commitment from mere compliance and argues that coercive compliance invites defensive behavior, silence, and literal obedience that weakens learning. A three component framework is offered: fairness in decision procedures, ethical use of authority, and credible routines for closing agreements. The paper emphasizes that micro interactions such as feedback delivery, public correction, and information withholding can escalate disputes into identity threats, reducing the capacity to deliberate. The central claim is that sustainable coordination requires negotiated boundaries that are realistic, consistently applied, and respectful of professional agency.

Keywords: leadership, subordinates, conflict, resistance, negotiation, procedural fairness, dignity.

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Introduction

The relationship between leadership and subordinates lies at the heart of organizational life because it is where decisions are translated into work, targets are transformed into action, and rules are confronted with daily reality. In this relationship, leadership is often understood as the ability to direct; however, for subordinates, the most tangible experience lies in the way instructions are conveyed, priorities are set, and uncertainty is managed. The quality of this relationship ultimately determines how performance is generated and the extent of loyalty given by organizational members in their work (Darmawan et al., 2020). When orders feel clear and fair, subordinates can link personal efforts to shared goals. When orders seem to change without reason, subordinates interpret the situation as uncertainty that threatens self-esteem and job security. At the same time, leaders face demands for accountability, resource constraints, and time pressures that demand decisiveness. This decisiveness is easily perceived as rigidity if communication does not provide space for questions. From this, it is evident that the leadership relationship is never value-free, as it concerns feelings of being respected, trusted, and having control over one's work. It is this sense of trust and justice felt by employees that subsequently builds a strong bond of commitment toward the organization (Hariani et al., 2022). Conflict and negotiation emerge as part of the process of building a workable order that is acceptable to both parties (Dulebohn et al., 2012).

In modern organizations, specialized division of labor makes leaders require information from subordinates, while subordinates require consistent decisions from leaders. This mutual interdependence creates a space for ongoing negotiation, though it is often not explicitly stated. For the working relationship to remain professional, every individual needs to continuously hone their skills and receive proper guidance from superiors (Sinambela et al., 2020). Negotiation can occur in target setting, workload distribution, determining priorities, and performance appraisal. When negotiation proceeds with respectful language, it becomes a means of adjustment that preserves dignity. However, when negotiation is restricted by rigid hierarchies, subordinates may express disagreement through indirect means, such as procrastination, minimal compliance, or the withdrawal of initiative. Just as with dynamics in broader society, differences of opinion are common occurrences in every social and political interaction

(Rojak et al., 2021). At this point, resistance is not merely rejection, but a social language stating that there is an imbalance in the exchange. Leaders may view resistance as insubordination, while subordinates view the leader's actions as coercion. This difference in interpretation adds tension because both parties feel they are being rational (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Thus, conflicts of interest can arise from differing readings of justice, fairness, and the boundaries of authority in daily work.

Conflicts of interest in the relationship between leadership and subordinates are often rooted in differences in goals between the organization and the individual, or differences in the methods used to achieve the same goals. Leaders are obligated to maintain unit performance, procedural compliance, and organizational reputation. Subordinates are interested in workload feasibility, recognition, growth opportunities, and life stability. In facing these differences, it is important for all parties to uphold values of honesty and ethics so that justice is maintained (Saktiawan et al., 2021). When organizational priorities are accelerated, subordinates may feel their basic needs are being sidelined. When subordinates demand space for learning or flexibility, leaders may feel that work discipline is weakening. Conflict of interest becomes real when resources such as time, budget, or personnel support are limited. Within limitations, every decision becomes a distributive decision, and distribution always involves a judgment of who is more important. This is where the sense of fairness becomes sensitive. Subordinates judge fairness from the experience of workload distribution, while leaders judge fairness based on the needs of the system (Cropanzano et al., 2007). If problems begin to arise, seeking a middle ground through discussion is often far better and more acceptable to all parties than continued dispute (Saputra et al., 2022). If these two measures of justice are not reconciled, conflict develops as a feeling of being unrecognized. Conflict then seeps into routines, affecting communication, reducing openness, and turning meetings into arenas for self-defense. Negotiation becomes a necessity, yet negotiation also carries risks because hierarchy can close off the opportunity to speak.

Subordinate resistance often emerges as a response to the experience of misalignment between organizational promises and leadership practices. Subordinates can accept high demands if they feel there is a reasonable

rationale and equitable treatment. However, if high demands are accompanied by supervision that undermines trust, subordinates may choose to protect themselves by limiting their engagement. Resistance can also arise when decisions are perceived to ignore the subordinates' practical knowledge. In operational work, subordinates often hold knowledge regarding process details, field risks, and customer needs. When this knowledge is not valued, subordinates feel their voice is considered unimportant. This feeling triggers symbolic resistance, such as refusing to provide input or declining to take initiative beyond formal duties. This type of resistance appears quiet, yet its impact is significant because the organization loses collective intelligence. Leaders may respond with tighter control, which ironically reinforces the resistance (Thomas & Davies, 2005). Ultimately, mutual understanding and openness are the primary keys so that cooperation within a team can run harmoniously and pleasantly. Thus, resistance can become a relational spiral, where a leader's actions trigger a subordinate's response, which then triggers the leader's subsequent action. Negotiation is needed to break this spiral, but negotiation requires communication legitimacy and a sense of psychological safety.

The negotiation process in daily leadership practice often takes place at a micro-level through brief conversations, schedule adjustments, or informal agreements on working methods. Negotiation does not always take the form of formal bargaining; rather, it can occur when a subordinate asks for clarification, when a leader requests additional commitment, or when both parties weigh risks. In negotiation, language becomes the primary tool. Language that explains reasons provides space for acceptance, whereas language that commands without reason invites rejection. Negotiation also demands recognition of boundaries for instance, limits of time, capacity, and authority. When boundaries are acknowledged, agreements feel realistic. When boundaries are denied, agreements feel like deferred coercion. Within a hierarchy, negotiation is always colored by asymmetry because the leader holds the authority of evaluation. This asymmetry makes subordinates calculate the risks of speaking up (Morrison, 2011). Therefore, the quality of negotiation is related to the psychological climate specifically, whether an objection is understood as input or perceived as a threat.

Normative discussion is necessary to assess the requirements for fair communication in negotiation.

The description of the problem in this topic relates to the tension between leadership demands to ensure compliance and the subordinate's need to maintain decent work autonomy. In many working relationships, leaders provide instructions for the sake of clarity, but overly detailed instructions can close off the subordinate's professional judgment. Conversely, excessive freedom can lead to the leader being perceived as failing to provide direction. This tension gives rise to conflicts that are often misunderstood as personal conflicts, even though they are frequently rooted in unclear boundaries of authority and responsibility. Subordinates may feel blamed for results they do not fully control, while leaders feel blamed for processes they do not execute themselves. When performance evaluations are used as a control tool, subordinates may interpret the evaluation as a threat rather than as coaching. This interpretation reduces openness and causes negotiation to take place in defensive language (Edmondson, 1999). In such circumstances, the conflict of interest no longer concerns targets, but rather professional identity and a sense of security. This issue requires a conceptual explanation of how conflict is expressed, hidden, or displaced into resistance.

The next description of the problem concerns how subordinate resistance and negotiation are often interpreted narrowly as disciplinary issues, causing the relational dynamics that birth them to remain invisible. Resistance can emerge as explicit rejection, but it frequently presents as superficial compliance, communication avoidance, or selectivity in following instructions. These forms are difficult to assess because they can appear as ordinary work behavior (Fleming & Spicer, 2003). Consequently, leaders tend to respond with additional standards and controls, while subordinates widen the distance to avoid being hurt by evaluation. Within this gap, negotiation loses its substance as both parties avoid risky conversations. Negotiation then turns into a formality an agreement reached on the surface but never internalized. This issue is also linked to unacknowledged conflicts of interest. When conflicts of interest are considered taboo, subordinates learn to convey objections through codes, sarcasm, or silence. Leaders then interpret silence as agreement. This lack of synchronization increases the likelihood of decisions that

cannot be implemented. Thus, the primary problem lies in the lack of an adequate conceptual framework to read resistance and negotiation as social communication within the work hierarchy.

This study aims to formulate a normative framework that explains how conflict of interest, subordinate resistance, and negotiation are formed in daily leadership relations. Many organizational discussions emphasize performance and compliance but provide little room for moral assessment regarding justice, respect, and recognition in work interactions. In fact, workplace conflicts often persist because the parties involved lack the conceptual language to name the tensions they experience without turning them into personal attacks. This writing is necessary to structure the understanding that resistance can serve as a relational indicator a sign that there is an exchange perceived as imbalanced or a decision that cannot be reasonably accepted. This writing is also required to clarify the requirements for proper negotiation within a hierarchy, including the requirement for transparency of reasons, realistic boundaries, and protection against the risks of speaking up (Ferris et al., 2009). With such a framework, organizations can evaluate leadership relations as an ethical practice rather than a mere managerial technique, allowing conflict to be read as material for normative learning.

The objective of this writing is to formulate a normative conceptual framework regarding conflict of interest, subordinate resistance, and negotiation in daily leadership relations. This writing aims to explain both visible and disguised forms of conflict, as well as to interpret resistance as a relational language within the work hierarchy. Furthermore, this writing aims to outline the requirements for fair negotiation: transparency of reasons, protection of dignity, and proportional limitation of authority. This framework is expected to enrich organizational theory discussions regarding power and interaction. Practically, this framework provides a reference for leaders and subordinates to build work agreements that are both acceptable and implementable.

Method

This study utilizes a qualitative literature study to construct a conceptual synthesis regarding conflict and negotiation within the leadership-subordinate relationship. Materials were selected from works discussing

conflict of interest, resistance, communication within hierarchies, and negotiation as a process for structuring work decisions. Greenfield and Greener (2016) emphasize the importance of methodological discipline for postgraduate writers, particularly in maintaining the flow of argumentation, orderly documentation, and precision in selecting sources relevant to the research question. Dudley (2005) highlights that research methods demand clarity of purpose and consistency of procedures so that readers can follow how the author constructs claims from the literature. Dawson (2002) emphasizes practical steps in research, including sharpening the focus, organizing themes, and systematic writing. In this study, themes are organized incrementally, starting from the definition of conflict of interest and the varieties of resistance to the concept of negotiation in daily interactions, before being assembled into a normative framework.

The processing of materials was carried out through iterative reading, grouping of concepts, and comparison between ideas to formulate coherent propositions. Richey and Klein (2014) discuss design and development research as a tradition that emphasizes systematic thinking about design and evaluation, which in this study serves as inspiration for designing a conceptual framework applicable to reading leadership practices. Scheurich (2014) emphasizes that methods must be sensitive to diverse ways of knowing and to power positions in the production of knowledge, ensuring that reasoning regarding leadership and resistance does not fall into oversimplified moral judgments. Since this writing does not utilize interviews or observations, emphasis is placed on the rigor of definitions, the orderliness of relationships between concepts, and the formulation of normative measures for communication, authority, and procedural justice in negotiation. The results are presented as a thematic synthesis that addresses the problem formulation through consistently tested arguments.

Result and Discussion

Conflict in the relationship between leadership and subordinates can be understood as a dispute over meaning regarding what is considered reasonable, fair, and implementable in daily work. Conflict is often mistaken purely as a clash of interests, whereas it is also a clash of

interpretations regarding obligations and boundaries. Leaders interpret the organizational mandate as a need to direct, evaluate, and correct. Subordinates interpret work obligations as a contribution that should be valued through respect, certainty, and autonomy. When this sense of justice is fulfilled, employees generally feel more engaged and enthusiastic in completing their responsibilities (Darmawan, 2012). When these interpretations meet without a bridge of communication, conflict forms as a sense of misalignment. Within a normative framework, conflict is not automatically bad, as it can reveal hidden assumptions that have long been accepted without question. However, conflict becomes destructive when it erases the recognition of the other party's dignity. This erasure of recognition is evident when a leader oversimplifies an objection as a weakness, or when a subordinate oversimplifies a directive as an intent to oppress. Therefore, an accurate reading demands a distinction between conflict as a difference in interpretation and conflict as an attack on identity (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). This distinction is vital because negotiation is only possible if the parties still recognize each other's legitimacy as work partners.

Conflicts of interest in organizations are frequently related to the distribution of resources, the distribution of time, and the distribution of risk. In every distribution, there lies a decision about who bears the burden and who receives the benefit. Leaders bear the risk of reputation and target failure, while subordinates bear the risk of exhaustion and personal evaluation. Leaders who can bring about positive change are usually able to transform office values for the better and support the development of all members (Rojak et al., 2022). When a leader shifts risk to subordinates without reasonable compensation, subordinates interpret the situation as injustice. When subordinates refuse an additional burden without offering an alternative, the leader interprets the situation as irresponsibility. Both of these readings often feel equally correct because they stem from different norms. The leader's norm is compliance with the mandate; the subordinate's norm is the protection of their capacity limits. Within a normative framework, conflict of interest needs to be read as a meeting of norms, rather than a mere clash of temperaments. If conflict is read as temperament, the organization will pursue personalized solutions, such as replacing individuals, while the exchange structure remains the same. An

imbalanced exchange structure will produce new conflicts with different actors (Budd et al., 2017). Thus, the discussion positions conflict of interest as a problem of distributive legitimacy specifically, whether the distribution of burdens and benefits can be justified through acceptable reasons and processes deemed fair.

Power asymmetry is a fundamental characteristic of the leader-subordinate relationship, and this asymmetry shapes the way conflict emerges (Coleman et al., 2013). Leaders hold formal authority to evaluate performance, determine tasks, and regulate access to opportunities. Subordinates depend on these evaluations for their professional future. Indeed, how a superior leads and assesses a subordinate's work results significantly determines the extent of an employee's desire to be actively involved in advancing the organization (Mardikaningsih & Darmawan, 2022). This dependency makes expressing an objection a high-risk activity. Within a normative framework, the risk of speaking up is an indicator of the quality of the working relationship. When the risk is high, conflict tends to be suppressed and emerges as indirect behavior. When the risk is low, conflict can be discussed without the need for disguise. Power asymmetry also influences negotiation, as agreements can be subtly forced through threats of evaluation, reduction of interesting tasks, or information restriction. An individual's performance indeed cannot be separated from the influence of leadership style and the willingness to contribute new innovative ideas at work (Putra & Mardikaningsih, 2022). Subtle coercion is difficult to prove but is clearly felt by the party experiencing it. Therefore, the discussion emphasizes that legitimate negotiation requires recognized boundaries of power; for instance, a leader should not use evaluation as a weapon during a negotiation conversation. These boundaries are not a softening of discipline, but rather a separation between the evaluation process and the agreement-building process, ensuring that dialogue is not stifled by fear.

Subordinate resistance can be understood as a form of social communication that arises when formal channels are deemed unsafe or ineffective. Resistance is often labeled negatively, yet normatively, resistance can carry messages regarding a mismatch between work demands and capacity, or about unfairness in workload distribution (Römer et al., 2012). Resistance can take the form of overt rejection, but

much resistance manifests as silent adjustments, such as reducing initiative, avoiding additional responsibility, or adhering to instructions literally without regard for the underlying objective. Literal compliance is often used as a shield, as it protects subordinates from accusations of defiance. However, literal compliance can also undermine work quality, because organizations require practical judgment, not just adherence to the text of an instruction. Within a normative framework, this type of resistance indicates a rupture in trust. Subordinates do not believe that initiative will be rewarded, or they do not believe that objections will be heard without retaliation. This rupture in trust triggers protective behavior. Thus, reading resistance as a message demands that leaders assess whether there is a justifiable reason behind the action. This discussion does not praise resistance but positions it as a relational symptom that requires moral reasoning regarding fairness and respect.

Conflict often develops through small, repetitive interactions, such as the way tasks are assigned, how feedback is given, and how questions are addressed. In these micro-interactions, tone of voice, word choice, and timing determine whether a subordinate feels valued or humiliated (Fells & Prowse, 2016). A leader who provides correction in public can cause long-lasting shame, even if the intent is to accelerate improvement. A subordinate who contradicts in public can create a sense of threat for the leader, even if the intent is to clarify facts. Within a normative framework, public and private spaces need to be distinguished in organizational communication. Corrections that affect dignity are safer when conducted privately, whereas the clarification of goals can be done collectively. When these boundaries are ignored, conflict easily transforms into a battle for reputation. Reputation battles tend to lock up negotiations because parties prioritize saving face. Furthermore, conflict is exacerbated by unclear standards. When work standards are unstable, subordinates feel the game is changing without notice. Unstable standards trigger insecurity. Insecurity drives resistance and speculation. Therefore, the discussion positions the stability of standards and communication ethics as normative foundations to prevent conflict from turning into a spiral of mutual suspicion.

Negotiation within a work hierarchy can be understood as a process of aligning expectations, setting boundaries, and building a shared commitment regarding working methods (Long, 2016). Negotiation is not

merely bargaining over material matters; it is the formation of acceptable rules of the game. Within a normative framework, proper negotiation requires transparency of reasons. A leader who communicates the reasons behind a decision provides space for subordinates to understand priorities and propose adjustments. A subordinate who communicates the reasons for an objection provides space for the leader to see operational risks that might have been overlooked. Transparency of reasons produces recognition—specifically, the recognition that the other party possesses rationality. Without recognition, negotiation devolves into a power transaction. Power transactions may produce short-term compliance but reduce commitment. Commitment differs from compliance; commitment is born when parties feel they have a sense of ownership over the decision. Therefore, the discussion emphasizes negotiation as the production of commitment, not the production of coercion. Additionally, negotiation requires procedural rules, such as when a decision can be reviewed, how changes in priority are announced, and how objections are documented. Procedural rules ensure that negotiation can be repeated fairly, rather than being dependent on mood.

Conflicts of interest often sharpen when an organization faces changes, such as shifts in targets, restructuring, or changes in evaluation systems. Change increases uncertainty, and uncertainty increases the need for explanation (Thomas et al., 2011). If a leader responds to uncertainty by withholding information, subordinates fill the void with rumors. Rumors amplify anxiety and accelerate polarization. Within a normative framework, information is a component of justice, as it allows individuals to assess situations and make responsible decisions. Withholding information can be justified when it concerns specific confidentiality, but such justification must be limited. If restriction becomes a habit, the organization produces a culture of distrust. A culture of distrust causes negotiation to lose its basis because the parties doubt each other's honesty. During change, resistance also easily emerges because change is often viewed as a threat to established competence. Subordinates may feel their skills are no longer valued, while leaders may interpret resistance as a laziness to learn. Within a normative framework, this judgment must be halted and replaced with a reading that change requires recognition of the

investment in experience. Without recognition, change becomes symbolic violence that drives passive resistance.

Resistance can be normatively categorized based on its orientation toward collaborative work. There is resistance aimed at protecting workplace safety, maintaining quality, or rejecting risky instructions. There is also resistance that purely avoids responsibility (Fousiani, 2020). This distinction is important so that leaders do not generalize all resistance as a disturbance. If protective resistance is treated as insubordination, the organization loses its internal correction mechanism. Internal correction serves as a balance of power. Within a normative framework, a healthy organization provides space for internal correction through safe objection procedures. However, objection procedures also demand an obligation from the subordinate to state reasons clearly and to offer viable options. Negotiation becomes the medium to transform resistance into improvement. In this discussion, negotiation is understood as a conversion process. Conversion means that the energy of rejection is processed into more realistic decisions. Conversion requires a sense of security; without it, subordinates opt for disguised language. Disguised language makes it difficult for leaders to accurately read risks. Therefore, the discussion emphasizes that the normative task of leadership is not to extinguish resistance, but to direct reasonable resistance into material for organizational learning, while rejecting destructive resistance through the enforcement of consistent standards.

In work relations, conflict is often related to reward and recognition. Recognition does not always mean praise, but the acknowledgment that effort is visible and that evaluations are conducted with fair measures (Yildiz, 2022). When subordinates feel their hard work is taken as a given obligation without recognition, motivation decreases and cynicism increases. Cynicism is a form of cognitive resistance, namely the belief that the organization is unfair. Cynicism is difficult to combat with commands because it operates as a framework of meaning. Within a normative framework, recognition relates to distributive justice and procedural justice. Distributive justice concerns the allocation of opportunities, burdens, and rewards. Procedural justice concerns the way decisions are made and explained. Good negotiation improves procedural justice by providing space for explanation, review, and reasoning. If procedures are

fair, individuals are more likely to accept unfavorable outcomes. Conversely, even a favorable outcome can trigger conflict if the procedure is perceived as humiliating. Therefore, the discussion emphasizes the importance of procedural ethics in leadership. Procedural ethics is not an optional extra but the heart of legitimacy. Without legitimacy, leaders rely on coercion. Coercion strengthens resistance. Thus, recognition becomes the normative key to keeping negotiation alive as a respected process.

The language of leadership determines whether a difference of opinion becomes a productive conflict or a destructive one (Long, 2016). Language that invites questions affirms that the leader believes in the subordinate's capacity. Language that closes conversation affirms that the leader demands compliance without dialogue. Within a normative framework, the right to speak in an organization is an element of dignity at work, because humans work not as tools but as agents who evaluate. When leadership language is demeaning, subordinates lose their sense of agency. A loss of agency drives minimal compliance. Conversely, respectful language does not mean being soft. Respectful language can be firm, yet accompanied by reasons, boundaries, and space for clarification. Negotiation becomes the vessel for structuring this language. In negotiation, leaders need to ensure that questions are not met with sarcasm. Subordinates need to ensure that objections are not delivered as insults. Dialogical ethics becomes a requirement. Dialogical ethics demands a focus on the work, not on character. If dialogue shifts to character, conflict becomes personal. Personal conflict locks out solutions because the parties become defensive. Therefore, the discussion affirms that ethical leadership structures language as a means of building trust, and ethical subordinates structure language as a means of communicating risk without causing harm.

Conflicts of interest also arise in the distribution of information. Leaders often have access to strategic organizational information, while subordinates have access to operational information (Rusaw, 2000). When a leader ignores operational information, decisions become fragile and subordinates feel used as executors without their knowledge being valued. When subordinates withhold operational information as a way to protect themselves, the organization loses the ability to respond to problems. Within a normative framework, the exchange of information is a form of

social contract within work. This contract requires trust, because providing information means opening oneself up to the risk of being blamed. Subordinates may fear delivering bad news because bad news is used for punishment rather than improvement. Leaders may fear opening up information for fear of being perceived as weak. These two fears reinforce a culture of silence. A culture of silence is fertile ground for disguised resistance and conflicts that explode without warning. Negotiation can restore the information contract if there is an agreement on how mistakes are discussed, how lessons are recorded, and how responsibility is shared. Within a normative framework, learning demands that mistakes are not always personalized. Personalizing mistakes causes people to close themselves off. Thus, the structure of information exchange becomes a core part of the discussion on conflict and negotiation, as it determines whether an organization is capable of managing interests in an acceptable manner.

In daily practice, many conflicts arise from a misalignment of expectations regarding time (Kashyap, 2022). Leaders pursue deadlines, while subordinates pursue quality and feasibility. When deadlines are accelerated without negotiation, subordinates feel forced to sacrifice professional standards. When subordinates demand time without understanding external pressures, leaders feel the team is insensitive to organizational needs. Within a normative framework, time is a moral resource because it is linked to health, family, and human limits. Demanding time without boundaries is equivalent to demanding sacrifice without recognition. This is where resistance may emerge as self-protection. Time-based resistance manifests in the refusal of overtime, procrastination, or restricted availability. To evaluate this resistance, a distinction must be made between reasonable protection and avoidance. Negotiation becomes a means of fairly managing time expectations. Proper negotiation includes explaining priorities, establishing work sequences, and acknowledging the consequences of the workload. If the consequences of the load are recognized, subordinates find it easier to provide additional commitment. If the consequences are ignored, commitment turns into forced compliance. Thus, the discussion positions time management as a territory of moral negotiation, not merely a technical scheduling issue.

Conflict between leadership and subordinates is often influenced by the definition of performance. The definition of performance can

emphasize numbers, processes, or the quality of relations (Fousiani, 2020). When the definition of performance changes without explanation, subordinates feel the rules of the game are unfair. When the definition of performance is applied selectively, subordinates perceive favoritism. Within a normative framework, favoritism is a violation of equality because it treats people differently without accountable reasons. The perception of favoritism amplifies resistance, as subordinates feel their efforts will not be evaluated fairly. Negotiation can help if the definition of performance is discussed as an agreement rather than a unilateral instruction. Agreement on the definition of performance includes clear indicators, space for explanation, and review mechanisms. Review mechanisms are important because work evolves. However, reviews must be conducted through consistent procedures so they do not transform into tools of control. Within a normative framework, legitimate control is control that is understandable and predictable. Unpredictable control triggers anxiety. Anxiety triggers defensiveness. Defensiveness lowers the quality of cooperation. Thus, the discussion affirms that the definition of performance is a point of conflict of interest because it determines who is considered successful and who is considered a failure. Therefore, the definition of performance needs to be treated as a space for dignified negotiation.

Resistance can also emerge as a critique of how a leader exercises authority. Some leaders use their authority to protect the team from unrealistic demands, while others use it to maximize compliance. Subordinates judge leaders based on the experience of protection or the experience of sacrifice. Within a normative framework, legitimate authority is authority bounded by responsibility. Responsibility means the leader bears the consequences of decisions and does not shift the entire risk onto subordinates. If a leader transfers risk while taking credit for results, subordinates feel exploited. Exploitation in work relations triggers moral resistance, namely the belief that the relationship is unethical (Brown & Mitchell, 2010). Moral resistance can persist even when incentives are provided, because the primary issue is the feeling of being treated as a tool. Effective negotiation requires the leader's acknowledgment of the limits of their authority. This acknowledgment can take the form of a willingness to change a decision when a subordinate's reasoning is strong, or a willingness to provide realistic room for

compromise. Subordinates also have a responsibility to maintain professionalism specifically, to deliver criticism based on work rather than personal attacks. Thus, the discussion emphasizes that resistance and negotiation cannot be separated from the ethics of exercising authority. These ethics determine whether a hierarchy is viewed as a structure of coordination or a structure of domination.

In hierarchical relations, conflict can occur due to differing interpretations of loyalty (Balser & Stern, 1999). Leaders often expect loyalty to manifest as compliance with decisions, while subordinates may understand loyalty as a commitment to work quality and professional values. When a subordinate rejects an instruction perceived as damaging to quality, the leader may interpret the refusal as disloyalty. When a leader demands compliance without room for discussion, the subordinate views the leader as disloyal to the values of good work. Within a normative framework, healthy loyalty is a loyalty that allows space for correction. Loyalty without correction is blind obedience. Blind obedience may produce short-term performance but increases the risk of error and undermines integrity. Therefore, negotiation is essential to structure the definition of loyalty. This negotiation demands that leaders recognize that criticism can stem from genuine concern, and requires subordinates to acknowledge that decisions must sometimes be made quickly. This mutual recognition reduces misinterpretation. When misinterpretation decreases, resistance can transform into participation. Participation means the subordinate is involved in improvement rather than merely rejecting ideas. Thus, the discussion positions loyalty as a normative issue often hidden behind conflicts of interest, and negotiation as a way to align loyalty toward goals with loyalty toward working principles.

Negotiation in daily leadership practice often relies on the existence of informal rules (Zoller & Fairhurst, 2007). Informal rules encompass team habits regarding who speaks first, how decisions are announced, and how objections are conveyed. Informal rules can facilitate smoothness if they are fair, but they can be oppressive if they close off access to speech for certain parties. Within a normative framework, access to speech is a form of procedural equality. Procedural equality does not demand that everyone holds equal power, but it demands that everyone has a reasonable opportunity to provide relevant

information. If informal rules result in certain subordinates being consistently interrupted or ignored, conflict emerges as a feeling of being undervalued. This feeling of being undervalued drives resistance, such as boycotting meetings or choosing silence. In such situations, a leader may erroneously conclude that subordinates have no ideas. This mistaken conclusion reinforces information-poor decision-making. Therefore, negotiation needs to include the structuring of informal rules. This structuring involves agreements on how to voice objections, how to present alternatives, and how to finalize decisions. Within a normative framework, finalizing a decision should be accompanied by a summary of reasons so the decision does not feel arbitrary. Consequently, the discussion affirms that negotiation is not only about the content of a decision but also about the interaction procedures that make the decision acceptable and implementable.

Conflicts of interest can transform into value conflicts when the organization requests actions that are perceived to contradict the subordinate's professional ethics (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2000). For example, a subordinate might be asked to expedite a process in a way that reduces quality or be asked to withhold information from certain parties. Within a normative framework, a value conflict is weightier than a workload conflict because it touches upon personal integrity. If a leader ignores a value conflict, subordinates may experience moral distress. Moral distress triggers resistance, psychological withdrawal, or a decrease in engagement. Negotiation becomes crucial to test whether the leader's request can be justified and whether there are alternatives that preserve integrity. In negotiating value conflicts, reasons must be stronger because what is at stake is the legitimacy of the action. An ethical leader needs to distinguish between legitimate business needs and requests that damage integrity. An ethical subordinate needs to convey objections with clear arguments rather than vague refusals. Within a normative framework, a mature organization provides channels for ethical objections without the threat of retaliation. These channels allow value conflicts to be discussed before they turn into scandals or reputational damage. Thus, the discussion places value conflict as part of the often-hidden dynamics of leadership, and negotiation as a mechanism to maintain justice while simultaneously safeguarding organizational integrity.

Subordinate resistance can also be understood as an effort to maintain professional autonomy (Viinamäki, 2009). Professional autonomy means the freedom to make technical decisions according to one's competence within the boundaries of agreed-upon goals. Leaders who micromanage can diminish this autonomy. The reduction of autonomy lowers the sense of ownership over the work. Without a sense of ownership, subordinates tend to work merely to fulfill orders. Within a normative framework, dignified work requires space for agency. Agency means that an individual can evaluate, choose, and take responsibility. If agency is removed, responsibility becomes superficial. Negotiation can restore agency by agreeing on the subordinate's decision-making space for instance, the space to choose methods, work sequences, or risk management strategies. However, negotiations regarding autonomy are often difficult because leaders fear losing control. This concern needs to be addressed through clear standards and fair evaluation, rather than through exhausting supervision. Within a normative framework, good control is control that builds capacity, not control that belittles. If a leader uses control to shame mistakes, the subordinate withdraws. If a leader uses control to clarify standards, the subordinate learns. Thus, the discussion positions resistance to micromanagement as a work ethics issue and negotiation as a tool to build a balance between coordination and autonomy.

Conflicts that are left unprocessed often transform into emotional escalation. Emotional escalation is evident when conversations become rapid, accusations increase, and good intentions are doubted (Rahaman et al., 2020). During escalation, both parties tend to seek evidence to reinforce their beliefs. The leader remembers subordinate behavior deemed lazy; the subordinate remembers leader decisions deemed arbitrary. Within a normative framework, emotional escalation reduces moral capacity because it becomes difficult for individuals to listen. Negotiations conducted during an escalation usually fail, as negotiation requires self-restraint and the ability to evaluate reasoning. Therefore, the discussion emphasizes the importance of separating the timing of the conflict from the timing of the negotiation. Separating time means providing a pause so that parties can return to professional language. However, a pause must not turn into avoidance. Avoidance causes conflict to fester and emerge as disguised resistance. Within a normative

framework, processing conflict requires the acknowledgment of emotions without allowing emotions to dominate decisions. Acknowledgment of emotions means stating that there is tension, that there is a feeling of being undervalued, and that there is a need for clarification. After acknowledgment, negotiation can be directed toward issues that can be agreed upon, such as task boundaries, priorities, and communication procedures. Thus, the discussion positions emotional regulation as an ethical prerequisite for negotiation within a work hierarchy.

Fair negotiation in the relationship between leadership and subordinates demands genuine procedural justice. Procedural justice means the existence of an opportunity to speak, the provision of reasons for decisions, and consistency in rules. The opportunity to speak does not mean the decision always follows the subordinate's wishes; rather, it means the subordinate's voice is seriously considered. Reasons for decisions mean the leader explains the considerations involved rather than merely asserting authority. Consistency means rules apply equally, so subordinates do not feel there are double standards. Within a normative framework, procedural justice increases acceptance, as people tend to accept unfavorable outcomes if the process is fair (Thibaut & Walker, 1975). Conversely, even a favorable decision can trigger conflict if the process is perceived as humiliating. Therefore, negotiation must be structured so that the process conveys respect. Respect can emerge through the manner of listening, summarizing, and closing the conversation. Closing a conversation should involve mentioning what was agreed upon, what was not agreed upon, and when the issue will be reviewed. Without a clear closing, negotiation becomes vague and triggers differing interpretations. Thus, the discussion positions procedural justice as the normative standard for negotiation, so that hierarchical relationships can function without relying on coercion.

Conflicts of interest are also evident in the use of rewards and sanctions. Leaders often use rewards to encourage behavior and use sanctions to maintain order. However, if rewards and sanctions are granted without clear reasons, subordinates perceive the system as manipulative (Bollen et al., 2012). Manipulative means forcing through non-transparent incentives. Within a normative framework, transparency of reasoning is an ethical requirement, because without transparency, subordinates cannot

assess what is reasonably expected of them. Furthermore, biased rewards reinforce resistance because individuals feel their hard work is irrelevant. Disproportional sanctions generate fear, and fear closes off communication. In a state of fear, negotiation becomes impossible. Therefore, the discussion affirms that the use of rewards and sanctions must be placed within understandable rules. These rules should ideally be linked to clear performance indicators. When indicators are clear, subordinates can evaluate them, and leaders can enforce them without a sense of arbitrariness. However, rules also need to provide space for consideration, as work always involves variation. This space for consideration must be explained so that it does not turn into favoritism. Thus, conflicts of interest related to rewards and sanctions demonstrate the importance of designing fair assessment procedures as a foundation for negotiation.

Resistance is often triggered by the experience of misalignment between workload and the support provided (Choudrie & Zamani, 2016). Support can take the form of resources, training, access to information, or cross-team assistance. When a leader demands results without support, subordinates feel they are being asked to take responsibility for something impossible. Within a normative framework, asking for the impossible is a form of injustice because it demands an outcome without providing the minimum requirements. In this situation, subordinates may choose resistance as a way to protect their reputation, such as refusing to take on a task to avoid failure. A leader may interpret this refusal as a lack of commitment, whereas the refusal is actually a reasonable risk calculation. Negotiation can transform the situation if the leader and subordinate together identify the minimum requirements for success. These minimum requirements include time, personnel support, and access to decisions. However, negotiation regarding support requires honesty from the leader about limitations. Honesty is vital because unfulfilled promises of support damage trust. Within a normative framework, a promise is a moral contract. If the moral contract is violated, resistance increases. Thus, the discussion positions support as an element of leadership ethics and negotiation as a tool to align demands with reasonable working conditions.

Conflict in leadership relations also relates to professional identity. Subordinates want to be seen as competent, and leaders want to be seen

as capable leaders (Coleman et al., 2013). When a leader corrects in a demeaning manner, subordinates feel their identity is being damaged. When a subordinate rejects a directive in a humiliating way, the leader feels their authority is being broken. Within a normative framework, maintaining professional identity does not mean protecting the ego, but rather maintaining the dignity of work that allows people to contribute. Good negotiation pays attention to this dignity. For example, criticism is delivered with a focus on the task, not on character. Recognition is given to the effort, even if the results need improvement. In conversations, both leaders and subordinates need to resist the temptation to assign labels such as "lazy" or "authoritarian." Labels kill dialogue because they lock in meaning. If meaning is locked, the parties have no room to change. Therefore, the discussion emphasizes that conflict touching upon identity needs to be approached with strict communication ethics. These ethics include choosing the right space, the right time, and the right language. Thus, negotiation is not merely a deliberation over content, but a deliberation over the way of relating. This way of relating determines whether conflict becomes a source of improvement or a source of long-term relational damage.

Negotiation is also influenced by the organizational structure, such as the chain of command, functional division, and reporting rules. Structure can clarify coordination, but it can also slow down conflict resolution if decision paths are too long. In situations with long paths, subordinates may feel there is no place to voice objections. Line managers may feel squeezed between the demands of superiors and the needs of the team. Within a normative framework, this squeezed position can trigger leaders to take shortcuts by forcing subordinates, as the leaders themselves lack room for upward negotiation. This situation demonstrates that conflicts of interest do not always stop between two parties. Conflict can spread through the chain of command as pressure. Subordinate resistance at the bottom can be understood as a reflection of pressure from above. Within a normative framework, organizations need to provide space for negotiation at every level so that pressure is not passed down as coercion. However, this discussion still emphasizes that ethical responsibility does not disappear because of structure. Leaders remain responsible for how they convey demands. Subordinates remain responsible for how they

convey objections. Thus, organizational structure shapes the field of negotiation, and this field needs to be interpreted so that conflict is not excessively personalized (Aime et al., 2014). This reading helps in assessing when conflict is a matter of work design and when it is a matter of interaction ethics.

Conflicts of interest can be exacerbated by the misalignment of incentives between units. A leader may pursue unit targets, while other units pursue different targets. Subordinates become trapped between two sets of demands. In such circumstances, subordinates may experience a conflict of loyalty—specifically, confusion over whom to obey. Conflicts of loyalty trigger resistance because every choice carries a risk. Within a normative framework, a fair organization does not place individuals in a dilemma without providing a clarification mechanism. This clarification mechanism can take the form of clearly stated and cross-unit agreed-upon priorities. Negotiation in this state needs to occur at a higher level so that subordinates do not bear the burden of coordination alone. Yet, in daily life, subordinates often still have to negotiate work sequences and deadlines. This micro-negotiation requires legitimacy from the leader. If a leader states that a subordinate is free to set priorities but later punishes the subordinate's choice, trust collapses. Collapsed trust gives birth to mechanical compliance. Mechanical compliance reduces adaptability (Kerr, 1975). Thus, the discussion affirms that conflicts of interest are often born from incentive design and target design, and negotiation becomes the means to align those designs with the human capacity performing the work.

Subordinate resistance to policy changes often arises because changes affect the sense of security and sense of capability (Kashyap, 2022). When a new policy arrives without adequate explanation, subordinates feel treated as objects. The feeling of being treated as an object triggers a withdrawal of engagement. Within a normative framework, explanation is a form of respect. An explanation does not guarantee agreement, but it opens the opportunity for acceptance. Negotiation during times of change needs to provide space for honest questions. Honest questions often contain concerns about workload, skills, and assessment. If a leader mocks these concerns, the leader reinforces resistance. If the leader acknowledges the concerns and organizes support, resistance can transform into

participation. This discussion affirms that resistance to change is often an evaluation of credibility. Subordinates assess whether the leader will protect them when risks emerge. If the leader appears to assign blame when results are poor, subordinates choose safety by rejecting the change. Thus, negotiating change demands that the leader builds credibility through consistency of words and actions. Credibility is the moral capital for leading. Without credibility, a leader possesses only formal authority, and formal authority easily generates repetitive conflicts.

Negotiation can be understood as the formation of a moral order within work. A moral order means an agreement on what is considered appropriate, such as overtime limits, methods for delivering criticism, and ways of making decisions during emergencies (Gramberg & Teicher, 2006). This moral order is rarely written, yet it is deeply felt. When the moral order is violated, individuals feel betrayed. The feeling of betrayal triggers intense conflict because it touches upon values. Within a normative framework, a healthy organization needs to recognize the existence of this moral order and not dismiss it as mere sentiment. For instance, if a leader demands full availability at all times, they violate the boundaries of personal life that are morally considered reasonable. If violations are repeated, resistance increases. Negotiation can restore the moral order through realistic agreements. Realistic agreements weigh organizational needs against human needs. This discussion emphasizes that good negotiation produces implementable rules, not ideal rules that are immediately broken. Rules that are immediately broken reinforce cynicism. Cynicism damages cooperation. Thus, negotiation is positioned as a mechanism for producing fairness namely, the production of boundaries that allow work to proceed without damaging dignity.

Conflict can also arise from differences in work styles and communication styles. A leader who is fast and direct may be perceived as rude, while a leader who is slow and cautious may be perceived as hesitant. A subordinate who is critical may be considered difficult to manage, while a silent subordinate may be considered passive. Within a normative framework, differences in style should not be immediately translated into moral judgments. Hasty moral judgments lock people into stereotypes. Healthy social interaction in the office actually significantly influences how satisfied someone is in performing their daily work (Darmawan, 2019).

Negotiation can help manage expectations regarding communication styles, such as agreeing on when a short message is sufficient and when a meeting is necessary. However, negotiating communication styles must still uphold respect that is, not making style a reason for belittlement. This discussion affirms that communication styles are related to perceptions of justice. If a leader always listens to one type of subordinate and ignores another, injustice arises. Injustice triggers resistance and conflict. Therefore, leaders need to be aware of communication biases, and subordinates need to learn to convey ideas in a format that can be heard (Tannen, 1995). This is not a demand for uniformity, but a demand to build bridges. Thus, the discussion places communication style as a negotiation field that is often invisible, yet determines the quality of the leadership relationship (Jablin, 1979).

The quality of negotiation can be assessed by whether the agreement results in consistent action (Msila, 2015). Many negotiations fail because the agreement is not accompanied by a follow-up mechanism. Within a normative framework, follow-up is a part of honesty. Honesty means the agreement is not used as a tool to soothe emotions without the intention of implementation. A good leader must be able to adapt their leadership style to the existing situation so that changes within the team can proceed smoothly (Mardikaningsih & Darmawan, 2022). If subordinates sense that negotiation is merely a formality, they stop speaking. Silence becomes resistance. The leader then loses access to information regarding problems. Therefore, negotiation requires an element of documentation, however simple for instance, a summary of decisions and an evaluation deadline. Documentation reduces differences in memory. Documentation also protects both parties from unilateral accusations. Within a normative framework, this protection increases the sense of security. A sense of security increases the courage to voice objections. The courage to voice objections allows conflict to surface early, making it easier to manage. Thus, the discussion positions follow-up as both a moral and practical requirement. Without follow-up, an organization produces distrust. Solid teamwork and good social relations between members will be the main supporters in achieving high-quality organizational goals (Putra et al., 2021). Distrust increases coordination costs because people feel they must supervise. Excessive

supervision reduces autonomy and strengthens resistance. Therefore, proper negotiation must bind itself to verifiable follow-up.

In leadership relations, conflicts of interest can be transformed into organizational learning if there is a space for safe reflection. A safe reflection space means people can discuss mistakes and misalignments without the fear of being humiliated. However, a safe space does not mean being free from accountability. Accountability is still necessary but must be channeled through fair procedures. Within a normative framework, learning requires a distinction between mistakes born of negligence and mistakes born of a poor system. In addition to focusing on tasks, modern leaders also need to pay attention to employee behaviors that support the sustainability and preservation of the work environment (Novita et al., 2022). If all mistakes are personalized, the organization closes off opportunities to improve the system. Subordinates learn to hide problems. Leaders learn to blame. This pattern reinforces conflict. Negotiation can become a gateway to learning if it is used to change procedures, not just to resolve incidents. For example, if conflict arises because of an imbalanced workload, negotiation needs to reorganize the distribution, rather than simply asking people to be patient. Within a normative framework, asking for patience without change is a form of neglect. Neglect triggers resistance (Cannon & Edmondson, 2001). Thus, the discussion affirms that meaningful negotiation produces tangible change. Tangible change increases trust. Trust lowers destructive resistance and increases participation. It is here that conflict can become a source of improvement if processed with ethics.

Thus, it is understood that conflict of interest and subordinate resistance are formed from the intersection of power asymmetry, burden distribution, and perceptions of justice in daily interactions. Resistance emerges when voice channels are unsafe or when demands are not accompanied by the minimum requirements for success. Negotiation functions as a mechanism for restructuring authority and responsibility when it meets normative requirements, namely transparency of reasons, procedural justice, protection of dignity, and verifiable follow-up. This framework positions conflict as an indicator of misalignment in work norms, rather than just a behavioral disturbance. This framework also positions resistance as social communication that needs to be interpreted,

not automatically punished. The application of leadership ethics and social responsibility is crucial so that organizational management can operate honestly and fairly for everyone (Rojak & Darmawan, 2021). However, resistance still needs to be evaluated ethically to distinguish reasonable protection from the avoidance of responsibility. Fair negotiation demands mutual recognition that both parties possess rationality and that hierarchy does not justify humiliation. Consequently, the discussion affirms that daily leadership is an ethical practice manifested in language, procedures, and the distribution of risk (Kellerman, 2004). When this ethical practice is implemented, conflict can be managed and negotiation generates commitment rather than forced compliance.

Conclusion

The dynamics of conflict of interest, subordinate resistance, and negotiation in daily leadership relations are rooted in power asymmetry and the assessment of justice inherent in the distribution of burdens, information, time, and rewards. Conflict is formed when differences in the interpretation of obligations and boundaries are not reconciled through respectful communication, causing tension to shift into issues of professional identity and security. Subordinate resistance is understood as a relational language that emerges when voice channels are perceived as risky or when demands are judged to lack adequate support. Negotiation is understood normatively as a mechanism for restructuring authority and responsibility, subject to the requirements of transparency of reasons, procedural justice, protection of dignity, and verifiable follow-up. This framework explains that leadership cannot be separated from the ethics of interaction, because the way instructions are given, feedback is delivered, and decisions are finalized determines whether genuine commitment is formed or merely a fragile, minimal compliance.

Implications and suggestions emphasize the need for organizations to structure communication and decision procedures as a means of protecting dignity as well as a means of accountability. Leaders need to establish legitimate negotiations through the explanation of reasons, recognition of capacity limits, and the separation of the evaluation process from the dialogue process to reduce the risks of speaking up. Subordinates need to strengthen objections based on work-related reasoning and offer

viable alternatives, ensuring that resistance does not end in directionless rejection. Organizations need to establish understandable standards of procedural justice for example, consistency in performance definitions, transparency in granting rewards and sanctions, and mechanisms for reviewing work agreements at reasonable intervals. Furthermore, there is a need for follow-up governance regarding negotiation results through decision summaries and evaluation points, so that negotiation does not turn into a mere formality. A conceptual suggestion for further writing is to specify indicators of procedural ethics and indicators of dignity protection as tools to assess the quality of leadership.

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