

# The role that Nepotism (Wasta) plays in conflict and conflict management within groups in private organizations in Jordan and MENA region

**Muna Kilani**  
**Rana Al Junidi**  
**Ruba Al Riziq**

*Department of Business Administration,  
King Talal Faculty of Business and Technology,  
Princess Sumaya University for Technology,  
Amman, Jordan*

## Abstract

There has been a shortage of relevant studies concerning Nepotism, specifically Wasta and its role in conflict and conflict management within groups in private organizations in Jordan and the MENA (Middle East North Africa) region. The aim of this study was therefore threefold: (i) To identify the antecedents of conflict within groups in private sector in Jordan, (ii) To identify group conflict in the private sector in Jordan and (iii) To identify the positive and negative effects of the antecedents of conflict such as Nepotism in specific Wasta, and Diversity private sector in Jordan. The effect of conflict and its antecedents on group performance is also examined. Interviews with managers in the private sector in Jordan and MENA were conducted in order to achieve the study objectives. Managers in the private sector in Jordan have concerns regarding Wasta and its effects on the performance of group members. However, there is a modern approach to Wasta and this paper will try to convey the principles behind it.

**Key words:** Nepotism; Wasta; Guanxi; Jeitimho; networking; and pulling strings.

## 1. Introduction

Conflict is a phenomenon that affects the everyday processes within group members in organizations and life in general. Studying conflict dimensions and the factors that contribute to conflict is essential in managerial contexts. Subsequently, it has become a topic widely discussed among researchers; some say that conflict may in fact produce a positive effect on the group performance, namely Simons and Peterson (2000), whereas others, such as Jehn (1995) disagree. Pruitt and Rubin (1986), analyze that beliefs and background may play a role in creating conflict, and therefore, any factor related to background and beliefs is worth looking further into, in order to analyze their effects upon conflict. Nepotism is the bigoted practice of hiring relatives and friends by a person in power or an authority figure. It is especially interesting studying Nepotism and analyzing its effect on conflict creation and management. Locally known as Wasta in the MENA region, Nepotism may also involve strangers whom are connected to an authority figure in a way or another. According to Cunningham and Sarayah (1993), Wasta literally translates to 'the middle' and is associated with the verb 'yatawas-sat', which translates to the act of "steering parties toward a middle point or compromise". Hence, Wasta refers to both the individual hiring relatives and friends on the basis of prejudice and the person who mediates or intercedes.

Wasta has been an institutional part of Jordanian society since its creation. In fact, according to Cunningham and Sarayah (1994), its tribal origins have centered on an intermediary role that is associated with prevention of retaliation in inter-personal or inter-group conflict. In accordance with the premise that Wasta is also a factor within Nepotism as a phenomenon (and works upon that concept of giving an advantage of those who are from the same background or family or relation), the analysis between the relation of Nepotism (namely Wasta in this context) and group conflict within private organizations in MENA region and Jordan to the most part, is of the essence, as it has not yet become commonly linked in the managerial context. According to Smith et al.

(2011), Wasta is the practice of giving someone the advantage they did not deserve, and that with its favoring someone with no direct expectation in return from the other party, Wasta is embedded and deeply rooted in the Arab world.

Mohamed and Hamdy (2008) make further references to the types of Wasta and the results of Wasta on the qualifications of employees. Furthermore, Shirazi (2010) analyzes the cause of Wasta and its relation to the implementation of a proper education system in Jordan, which weakens the economic stance, and that education is the medicine for Wasta. Vodosek (2007) analyzes the culture and conflict management relation, conflict resolution and legal litigation needs of Wasta, and its underlying history.

Wasta has become a norm in the Middle East and Jordan and part of the society, even in the smallest aspects of Arab life according to Shah et al. (1993), in the observation of the extent to which it affects group conflict within organizations. In fact, it is not restricted to the group of "relatives and friends" associated with nepotism, but may involve further dimensions such as hiring someone as a return for a favor. With the recognition that it is a critical, if not an almost indispensable factor in several organizations, and yet has not been studied from a theoretical point of view, this particular study will be beneficial in terms of creating awareness on the role that Wasta plays in conflict and conflict management within organizations, and with the aim of reaching a conclusive analysis that helps identify Wasta and its link to conflict.

With regard to the interrelation between Diversity and Wasta, our hypothesis remains that diversity and Wasta contribute to tribal connections, which are part of the diversity context. From a social context, as citizens living in Jordan, we have indeed also experienced the diversity in relation to tribal backgrounds; the opportunity of finding a job does differ according to the tribal background and includes events in which one may be faced with almost undiplomatic questions (such as the full name, family history, third-degree relatives, etc.) that try to determine a person's tribal background; this particular instance, for example, translates into what we commonly face the context of Wasta .

## Literature Review

Wasta can have both positive and negative effects, just as is the case with diversity; it can create motivation and enhance the type of competition in working environments, where people start to work harder in order to prove their competencies. Yet on the other hand, it may also create jealousy or hatred among members because of comparisons, such as whose Wasta happens to be stronger or better. Furthermore, diversity as a result of Wasta might play a role in conflict. Janssen et al. (1996) state that conflict, as a result of the role that diversity and Wasta play, can have a positive or a negative effect on group members within an organization. It can create a positive, as well as a competitive atmosphere that can motivate group members, while some of us envisage the competitive environment to become hostile and unstable, or unsuitable for a healthy working environment (Shirazi, 2010).

## Organizational Conflict

There are several definitions of conflict that may result from the strongly divergent needs of the two parties, or due to the lack of mutual understanding. Conflict may for instance occur when both parties are working towards the same goal, and generally aim for a similar outcome, as well as alternatively, when both parties seek highly different outcomes. On a similar note, Pruitt and Rubin (1986) argued that "the perceived divergence of interest, or belief that the parties' current aspiration cannot be achieved simultaneously."

After defining conflict, we move to acknowledging its characteristics and levels. There are several levels of conflict, the first level being Intrapersonal or intra-psychic conflict. According to Bazerman, Tenbrunsel and Benzoni (1998), this level of conflict develops within individuals, within their thoughts, emotions, values, beliefs and/or ideas. An example of such instance could be a situation wherein a father goes through the emotional struggle of wanting to punish his son for bad behavior, yet finding the difficulty of acting upon that due to his altruistic emotions towards him. This type of conflict is analyzed and managed by psychologists and psychiatrists.

A second major level of conflict is interpersonal conflict. Such conflict occurs between individuals within organizations, such as co-workers, as well as spouses, siblings, roommates, or neighbors on a daily basis. For instance, a problematic situation may arise if an employee experiences agitation due to the behavior of a coworker of theirs, in which case explicit conflict is reflected through elaboration on words and actions.

The final level of conflict is intragroup conflict; it describes conflict between the members of organizations, ethnic groups, and communities. Conflict within a group will result in difficulties making a decision, since members are not agreeing on the same matters or points of thought. As a result, the productivity of this group will decrease, and objectives will not be achieved due to the variety of opinions and disagreement on goals. The involvement of a large number of people in this kind of conflict makes it much more problematic in terms of both interpretation and management.

In order to attain a deeper and broader understanding of conflict, there are several types of conflict, which mainly constitute of task, relationship, and process. According to Mannix (2003), task conflict is, basically speaking, the disagreement between individuals within groups, due to differing opinions on how tasks should be carried out, such as the allocation of resources, or the implementation of a strategy within organizations. According to Jehn (1997), relationship conflict arises from personal differences among individuals in groups, and is not task related. Instead, such conflict is for the most part focused around social events, gossip, political views and of course, different perspectives. Thirdly, process conflicts consist in disagreements within individuals, in relation to matters such as the way in which a job should be approached, the persons responsible for certain tasks, as well as how things should be delegated and performed. As Mannix (2003) maintains, process conflict is different from task and relationship conflict; each one has a different effect on group performance.

There has been a debate in organizational research regarding whether or not agreement and disagreement within groups could be advantageous. According to Jehn (1994), conflict can be useful for team performance and can be beneficial for the outcome, as it may also create healthy competition or motivation, and henceforth lead to the enhancement of problem-solving skills amongst individuals. On the other hand, relationship conflict is harmful in that it may lead to a negative relationship between co-workers, team effectiveness, and thereof, creating a hostile environment. Working on non-routine procedures requires task conflict, since creative and deliberate thinking is necessary in order to solve the issues that come up. More precisely, Amason and Schweiger (1997) argue that team members and groups focus on each other-i.e. facing relationship conflict, which as a result creates a hostile environment, functioning as a distraction from focusing on task-related performance issues. Hulin (1990) also adds that the nature of such conflict leads to high turnover of members, such as absenteeism. Decision-making suffers from relationship conflict more significantly, as opposed to task conflict. In their research, De Dreu et al. (2003) conclude that both task and relationship conflict are disruptive, as both sources of conflict fundamentally affect team performance, and hence, leading us to the point that no conflict is worse than the other.

From a managerial perspective, there are three types and levels of conflict within formal organizations. The first type is what is known as the bargaining conflict among parties of an interest-group relationship. On the other hand, the bureaucratic conflict typically occurs between the parties of a superior-subordinate relationship, such as that between an employee and his or her supervisor. Finally, systems conflict arises among parties of an adjacent or working relationship. As Pondy (1967) explains, such conflict may occur between two managers of different departments on the same organizational level.

### **Diversity and Nepotism**

As far as we have determined through our review on literature, a matter which has the greatest impact upon conflict within groups in organizations, is the diversity that exists between people's thoughts, backgrounds, and social statuses. The dissimilarities between culture, thoughts, background, beliefs, and social status of certain individuals play a role in Nepotism and Wasta. Therefore, Wasta is consistently related to diversity.

When there is diversity within groups, this may trigger conflict within the groups concerned. Mannix and Neale (2005) discuss the two perspectives of diversity, including both the positive and negative effects. The argument goes as follows: the more diversity we have, the higher the likelihood for amplified creativity in performance, as well as knowledge leading to better quality in a team or group performance. Yousef (2001) states that diversity creates social divisions. These can create negative performance outcomes for the group.

The most common understanding of diversity, introduced by Williams & O'Reilly (1998), states that it is any characteristic

that another individual may use to perceive another person's dissimilarities. As a result, researchers, including Mannix and Neale (2005), have chosen to utilize the existing information concerning various labeling schemes, based on features such as race or gender, or labeling built upon proportions, such as the size of the minority, so as to further refine the definition of diversity in teams. With regard to the types and categories of diversity, that can be a trigger in conflict within groups, there are three primary theoretical perspectives: the similarity-attraction paradigm, self- and social categorization, and information processing.

The similarity-attraction theory detects similarities in characteristics, such as attitudes, values, and beliefs. The similarity-attraction paradigm was developed to understand the business relationships between two parties. However, it is also worth noting that individuals can express preferences for membership in particular groups, even when they have had no prior social interaction with the members of that group. According to Mannix and Neale (2005), this is primarily a cognitive process of categorization-i.e. individuals are assumed to have a classified structure of self-categorizations at the personal, group, and superordinate levels. Finally, the information-processing theory views diversity as a positive factor, by creating an environment that enhances group performance. In other words, according to this theory, by having different backgrounds and experiences, productivity should improve accordingly. Although, Mannix et al. (2005) note that this might also cause problems deliberating from these differences.

Since we know that Nepotism is a main factor in conflict creation, especially as it is related to diversity and commonly used within organizations in Jordan and the MENA region, it is also important to recognize the several types of Nepotism: Wasta, Guanxi, Jeitimho, networking, and pulling strings, each based on a different culture and region. As Cunningham and Sarayah (1993) explain, Wasta is that which commonly arises in the Arab world; it is when relationships between people are used to achieve goals through linking middle people who share common benefits, favors, interests, background, and/or characteristics. On the other hand, Jeitinho, a common word and concept used in the Brazilian world, refers to achieving short-term solutions to problems. It can be used to avoid difficulties with superiors in a strong hierarchal context. According to both Barbosa (1995), Jeitinho involves working with a person who may or may not be an acquaintance. Furthermore, Pulling strings is common in the United Kingdom, and is based on gaining favors through networks, which may be either long-term connections (such as family), or short-term connections (such as acquaintances).

Guanxi and Wasta refer to being extra pleasant to the superiors, such as buying them gifts, calling them, or visiting them through holidays. If the establishment of this relationship fails, this will consequently also lead to a loss on the part of the person who wants the benefit.

In Jordan and the MENA region, Wasta-which literally translates to 'the middle', is commonly used in a mutual benefit context. It involves a middle person or median gives

a particular benefit for a certain party. This benefit can be mutual or a returned favor. According to Van de Vliert et al. (1993), a favor may be done according to the relation of tribal background and origin. The Wasta or middle person holding a high social and economic status can be asked to give the solution of a problem. However, Wasta has evolved from conflict resolution as a means of survival and intercession. In fact, according to Cunningham and Sarayrah (1993), to maintain one's place of honor within contemporary Jordan, Wasta is used to achieve what is perceived unattainable. Wasta is not only a conflict creator. The main use of Wasta back in the 1930s was conflict resolution, after which it evolved like any cultural aspect. According to De Dreu et al. (2001), any social intermediation would solve the most complicated conflict back in the 1930s and 1940s and until this day, conflict of homicides and murders are solved using Wasta within huge Jordanian tribes.

According to Abdallah (1996), an Arab individual, concerned with conflict management, sets the other person in the right social place, as people usually identify the tribal and family name before any business interaction. However, the creation of an anchoring relation and bond is essential for any business relation. To move from the Arab world to the west, individuals are more interested in personal value and professional success.

Today, Wasta is perceived in a different light, people are now more aware of its use and acceptance. As a result of globalization, Western working methods and values are adopted; qualified employees are a must, as well as the incorporation of their experience in the field of work. In other words, and as Ali (1992) expresses, risks cannot be taken while hiring people, especially though Wasta.

The use of Wasta is very contradictive; it is a legal act within certain sectors and working environments within the business society, yet may also act as the root for a questionable amount of unethically bigoted and even illegal results. In relation to this contradictive nature, Danet (1989) suggest that if you, for instance, happened to be a CEO of a company, it is acceptable to hire someone using Wasta, but if you hear that someone else in another company did the same, you will immediately consider it immoral. Rugh (2002) also adds that, in the past generation, the use of Wasta was an important tool in life. Today, the younger generations in society are highly educated

and aware that they are less likely to use Wasta in the wrong way.

### Methodology

Our research objective is to identify: i) the different practices or employments of Wasta, ii) the effects of Wasta, iii) the conflict created by the appliance of Wasta within organizations, as well as iv) the potential effects upon the quality of work within private organizations in Jordan due to Wasta. After conducting the interview, we will be able to conclude upon the thoughts and perceptions regarding the particular role that is played by Wasta in conflict and conflict management within organizations, namely in private organizations within Jordan and the MENA region.

Our interview questions were set in accordance with our research model, further portrayed in (Figure 1), as well as the core contexts discussed earlier in the literature review section. To be more precise, the research model was established after the study of several sources regarding conflict, Wasta, and diversity, focusing on the factors that can play a role in conflict in relation to Wasta.

### Interview questions

#### • Part 1:

- 1- What is your position in the company?
- 2- How long have you been working with your company?
- 3- Which sector is your company's sector in the Jordanian market?
- 4- Is it considered a private or public company?
- 5- How many employees are under your direct supervision?
- 6- How many employees are in the company?
- 7- Does your company operate in other countries? If yes, please state which country. And if you are involved in the other countries management teams, how are you involved?
- 8- When has your company been established?
- 9- How is your organizational structure constructed? In teams or groups (define the difference between teams and groups)?
- 10- How often do you witness conflict in your group members (state types of conflict)?
- 11- Can you define what kind of conflict or describe it based on the definitions given before in Q10?
- 12- Do you think diversity creates conflict? If yes why do you think so? ( define diversity )

### Research Model:



Table 1: The respondents

Nr.	Position	Years in the company	Sector	Number of employees under supervision	Number of employees in the company	Countries of operation	Establishment of company
1	Director of business development and marketing	14	Education Technology/ Private	Enclosed	enclosed	UAE, Kuwait, Jordan, Palestine	2013
2	Team Leader	9	Pharmaceutical /Private	5	25-30	Jordan, Asia	2006
3	Incubation manager	10	Entrepreneurship projects directing / Middle(Public-Private)	1	15	Jordan	2003
4	Environmental and social governance department manager	10	Advisory research /Private sector	5	25	UAE, Qatar, Jordan, KSA, Morocco	2007
5	Head of shared products	9	Software / Private sector	2	200	MENA region, Part of EU, Gulf Cooperation Council	2000
6	CEO/Co-Founder	18	Business Information technology/ Private sector	22	22	Jordan, KSA, Gulf Cooperation Council, Lebanon	2002
7	Accounting Manager	8	Private sector	10	16000	KSA, Turkey, UK, Japan, Europe	1955

13- Do you have the tools to solve conflict within groups? If yes, please state which.

14- Do you think conflict has a positive or a negative effect on group performance? If yes, how?

#### • Part 2 :

1- Define Wasta from your own perspective .

2- Do you think Wasta plays a role in conflict within team members?

3- Have you ever witnessed Wasta in your working space? If yes, please elaborate.

4- From your own working experience perspective, do you think Wasta triggers conflict within group members? If yes, please elaborate.

5- Do you think that the employees within your working space are qualified for their jobs?

6- If yes, why do you think so?

7- If no, why do you think so?

8- If no, do you think it affects the performance and the outcome of the company?

### Data Analysis

For our research, both primary and secondary data will be used to aid and expand our areas of knowledge and discussion. This includes literature review and the gathering of Primary data, namely business books, in addition to different websites, journals, research, and articles, in order to help understand the topic, as well as narrow down the research. Our secondary data was obtained by conducting interviews with managers from private organizations in Jordan, working in companies that also operate in the MENA region and Gulf area.

### Discussion

To begin with the analysis of the results obtained, we will be discussing the answers that follow from the interviewees' perspectives based on the previous questions, to enable a thorough analysis.

#### Conflict within groups and teams

In accordance with our research model, our main subject of study and discussion is the conflict within groups and teams in private organizations in Jordan and the MENA region.

One of our questions, question 9, was designated to inquire on the ways in which our interviewees or respondents define their organizational structure, as well as how their definitions of teams or groups differ in particular: "How do you define your organizational structure? Do you work in teams or groups?"

According to our analysis, all seven interviewees stated that, in correspondence with their organizational structure, they prefer to work in teams. Some of the interviewees stated that they work both individually and in teams, depending on the nature of the project or task required. Furthermore, interviewee 6 stated, "for every project there is a different team that is

founded." Interviewee 5 added: "We are a team based company-we do not work on projects, but we work on products." However, to emphasize the argument that most organizations prefer team-based work, according to the tasks that need to be done, it is worth noting an elaboration made by interviewee 1 that, "when working in a startup you cannot define groups and teams-everyone needs to work in whatever is assigned to get things done."

It appears that employees today are not as concerned if it is a team or group based organizational structure; the main concern here is the outcome and effectual fulfillment within a healthy work environment.

Moving on to study the rate of recurrence in relation to conflict, we set off by querying the frequency in which our interviewees or respondents have witnessed conflict in relation to their group members-i.e. question 10: "How often do you witness conflict in your group members?" According to just four interviewees, it seems that conflict rarely takes place in their organization. As for the rest of our interviewees, it has been clearly stated that conflict happens very often within the organizations they are involved in.

This led us to question 12: "Do you think conflict has a positive or a negative effect on group performance?" Most of the interviewees agreed that conflict may have both a negative and/or a positive impact on group performance. In the following example interviewee 1 specified the levels of conflict escalation and how it evolves with time:

"On the day of the conflict, performance goes down to almost zero. On the other hand, after that the performance goes from what is normal (70%) to a significantly higher rate in performance (90%). Employees become more motivated and need to prove their point regardless of whether the conflict was on their side or someone else's side, so it does create motivation."

On the contrary, interviewee 2 mentioned the negative aspects of conflict:

"Conflict has a very negative effect on performance, because there will be a negative atmosphere and they will be more focused on how to solve the conflict or to obtain what they personally believe is right. For example, seeking revenge from the person they are in dispute with, which will distract them from focusing on the task itself and being productive instead."

Interestingly, interviewee 3 went forth in declaring the positive sides of conflict through a metaphorical example:

"If you have a mountain and you want to get to the top of the mountain, there are a million ways of arriving at the desired point: you can go around, you can go straight, you can jump, you can crawl and so on. This is the nature of diversity: some people are comfortable with crawling, while others are not. This is what brings us all together, you will learn from people how to do things differently."

## **Antecedents of conflict, diversity and Wasta interrelated to conflict**

It is of great importance to analyze whether or not diversity plays a role in creating conflict within organizations. According to what we found from the previous research, diversity is interrelated to conflict. We approached this area by raising question 13: "Do you think diversity creates conflict? If yes, why do you think it is so?"

Interviewee 1 suggested that:

"Diversity is both positive and negative. When it is positive, it is because we have different backgrounds, and so, we get better outcomes, as everyone shares their own experience and way of thinking. However, having a high level of diversity will cause conflict at times, in which case everyone needs to figure out why is this happening and how-recognizing if your experiences and background are appropriate given that specific context. So, if you look at the positives, they are significantly more apparent than the negatives-that is, if people look at it in a professional and beneficial way."

On the other hand, interviewee 2 stated that: "Diversity helps reduce conflict-the less diversity, the more conflict you have within the organization". He explained this further by giving a real life example from his own experience:

"I've worked in an organization where every employee was from a different country and the harmony between employees was amazing. There were employees from India, Pakistan, Palestine, Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia and we all became friends because there was no single group of people with a similar background, and so everyone was equally interested in working together."

On the other hand, interviewee 3 suggested the opposite, as she mentioned that when dealing with diversity, "you have to know how to deal with people," and further specified her statement by adding:

"Since people come from different cultures and backgrounds, you cannot deal with each person in a unique manner, because it may lead to a misunderstanding in relation to what the other person wants to achieve from this task."

Furthermore, interviewee 4 stressed upon the fact that diversity creates conflict by laying emphasis on the fact that not only is there a correlation between diversity and conflict, but that it is not only present in organizations. In fact, "diversity creates a misunderstanding in terms of communication in general." To elaborate upon the latter argument, our respondent gave the following example based upon his working experience in France: "An individual from France for instance is more predisposed to indirect communication, as they are not straight to the point. Unlike the Anglo-Saxon system of communication, France and any country that was affected by the French culture, such as Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, would turn around the ideas rather than just to convey the idea." To be more specific in regards to culture and systems of countries, she also stated that, "In the American system (i.e. the Anglo-Saxon system),

communication is more direct and hence, enables one to really convey their ideas, making less room for conflict of interest in the Anglo-Saxon managerial system. As opposed to the French managerial system, Jordan is more of an Anglo-Saxon System."

On the contrary, on a more or less optimistic note, a particular respondent offered a different point of view, as he said: "I think diversity brings happiness and prosperity because it brings new ideas and cultures, as well as new ways of communication, making it a positive component to a company". Additionally, interviewee 5 offered the following example from his personal experience: "I personally support diversity in the company. We hire people from ISAAC. In fact, we have a Chinese employee and are going to hire another lady from India, as well as Turkey, based on our belief that different types of thinking will contribute toward better results."

In accordance with the points gained from our respondents, it seems reasonable to assert that diversity has a positive impact on organizations, as the most successful organizations in the world have much diversity in their workforce, for example: Microsoft, Apple, and many others.

## **The second area of analysis, antecedents of conflict, Wasta**

Due to our belief, Wasta is a very important area of study, as it plays a major role in the managerial context of private organizations in Jordan and the MENA region. We have decided to ask the managers to give their opinion on Wasta, as well as the role it plays in conflict and conflict management. We started with question 1: "How do you define Wasta from your own perspective?" Interviewee 1 gave the definition of Wasta, in relation the recruiting process, by stating the following:

"Wasta is outside people interfering in the actual work for unnecessary reasons, sometimes having an employee work in the company with no good experience, which is bad and affects the company's moral aspect. When someone is hired by Wasta and is not qualified, they will fail in the job as a whole."

On the other hand, in addition to providing a definition, interviewee 2 stressed on the point that if the person with Wasta is qualified then there is no harm in hiring them:

"Wasta is an individual bringing in another related individual into an organization. Whether that person is a relative or a friend, it will not make a difference if the person concerned is qualified, which makes it a good thing. However, sometimes this person is not qualified which is bad, and it creates obstacles within the organization."

Hence, the definition by this particular respondent shed a light upon the dual nature of Wasta, as well as perhaps the potential obstacles in approaching such matter.

Moreover, interviewee 3 brought to light another perspective, asserting that Wasta is good when used to achieve a proper business relation, as it guarantees working with someone

who is recommended and familiar. To quote this particular respondent: "Wasta is when you use other people's achievements in life to benefit your own." Our respondent explained that Wasta is not always a negative thing, since knowing someone you want to do business with is oftentimes much easier than doing business with someone you do not know personally, and hence cannot guarantee the success of the ensuing cooperation. In fact, to him it is simply a process of helping and recommending someone, and which he explained further by providing an example of a means by which it could be applied, such as, "by placing the CV of the person with Wasta on top of the other CVs."

In accordance with the answers received from our respondents, it seems reasonable to assert that depending on the manner in which it is implemented within the managerial context, Wasta can be a factor in conflict creation and at the same time may also function as an opportunity creator.

Proceeding to analyze the interrelation of the antecedents of conflict (Wasta), as well as the role it plays in conflict and conflict management, we asked the following question 2: "Do you think Wasta plays a role in conflict amongst team members?" Interviewee 1 argued that Wasta can be a conflict creator if it is used in an improper or incompetent manner and stressed that: "Yes, if the person was unfairly hired with Wasta, and not qualified," this will most likely cause conflict amongst team members. He also analyzed that the sequences of such type of conflict will appear later on, with a more integrated effect, explaining that: "Such conflict will not appear on the spot; such conflict will appear late and cause further conflicts."

Interviewee 2 described the role Wasta plays in conflict by giving a real life example, and said:

"Yes, of course. My manager hired his younger brother and he has a minimal stage of autism, making him incapable of communicating properly with people. As a sales person, he has been in this position for two or three years, and no one really wants him to stay in the company because he is pulling his team back. Yet no one can do anything about it. When people talk to our manager about his autistic brother, it only leads to arguments and disputes between the manager and those complaining about the situation. Such a situation creates more conflict, triggered by the general tension created by the initial conflicting situation between the manager and his employees, due to the fact that a complaint was taken personally by the person in charge."

To furthermore analyze Wasta and the role it plays in conflict, we wanted to observe its commonality. Therefore, we asked question 3: "Have you ever witnessed Wasta within your working space?" Interviewee 2 stated that he had witnessed Wasta more than once in his working space and provided a real life example:

"My manager hired his friend's daughter, who was not qualified, and that led to a lot of issues within our company. She only stayed for six months, during which she delayed the team. In other words, she was a burden on the team. She weighed us

down, instead of contributing to our progress as a team, as she was not even interested in the job, but merely accepted it due to her father's demands."

In relation to this, interviewee 3 stated that, "it is very common, and that in Jordan it is more common in the public sector rather than the private sector." On the other hand, interviewee 5 provided us with a new perspective on Wasta by saying:

"In our company, our CEO is a feminist, and thus, is devoted to empowering women. However, she assigned an unqualified manager just because she is a female and she would support her even when the general manager, who is also the CEO's husband, would note something wrong about the work of the newly assigned manager. Only after 7 years did the CEO realize that she cannot support her anymore."

Through their answer, not only did our respondent expose the biased favoring practiced by those entitled to hire, bearing in mind that the general manager is also related to the CEO, but the example provided by our respondent brought to light the potential gender issues in relation to Wasta worth examining further in future research. As for the answers received from the rest of our respondents, there appeared to be no real case of Wasta. Bearing in mind that the respondents were from a private sector, and recalling our earlier deduction that Wasta is significantly more common in the public sector rather than the private sector, it appears that, indeed, the organizational strategy of these particular respondents makes sure that Wasta does not take place in their working environment.

To sum up our analysis and conclusions regarding Wasta, we inquired about the perceptions of managers in relation to the qualifications of their employees, by asking our respondents question 4: "Do you think that the employees within your working space are qualified for their jobs?" Interviewee 1 stated that "80% are qualified, whereas the remaining 20% are not, due to the fact that they had been hired without sufficient familiarity with their backgrounds or previous experience, but Wasta was at no point involved in this equation." On the other hand, interviewee 2 stated that:

"Even if the person hired is initially qualified, yet as an employee does not work hard to improve and develop their skills and position within the organization, he/she will become unqualified for the job. Then again, if a person is not qualified for a job but works hard to develop and improve, they will have a better chance in keeping their job and becoming qualified ultimately."

Contrariwise, Interviewee 4 stated that throughout his working experience, all the occurrences of Wasta encountered by him were appropriate recommendation of qualified individuals. Interviewee 5 gave an extended perception for the qualifications of the employees by providing the following explanation: "If we have technical employees who were hired by Wasta and we later discover that they are not qualified after all, we can always transfer them to another department where they might still perform a great job."

Moving on from the qualifications of employees, the broader context to be dealt with is the role Wasta plays in the conflict within the organization as a whole. The purpose of the following questions is to tackle issues of performance within organizations. In fact, performance is the most important factor in our research model; it is the means by which we may determine a comprehensive outcome for our research question. We started off by asking our respondents question 5: "Do you think Wasta affects the performance and the outcome achieved by the company?" Interviewee 5 explained:

"If a person was hired with Wasta, this person will stay for a specific period of time, during which they may prove themselves to be working properly, in which case they are certified to stay. At the end of the day, this is a business, and we need employees to work efficiently. Hence, if someone is hired by Wasta and proves that they are not good enough, they will be dismissed, because ultimately, this is a business, and it requires someone who may provide the company with a proper KPI (key performance indicator). All in all, with or without Wasta, if the employee concerned is bringing back profit and working, they are here to stay. However, if faced with the opposite situation, the person will by default be dismissed from the position. In other words, if the person affects the performance and quality of work in an adverse manner, they will be removed."

Interviewee 3 expressed a bilateral view on whether Wasta affects the performance and the outcome achieved by the company, stating that any person with Wasta is most probably qualified, which would therefore function as a positive influence upon performance. However, she then stated the opposite regarding her experience in the public sector, explaining the following:

"In this company, it works as a positive factor, because when you hire someone using Wasta, this means you hired someone through the employment of a strong network, which aids in the recruitment and selection process, leading to positive outcomes and performance within the organization. However, in the public sector, it works negatively, since people that are hired come from one family, leading to no diversity at all. Additionally, not all of those hired are qualified, leading to a significant decline in performance and outcomes."

In light of the points made by our respondents, the common pattern that seems to be highlighted is that Wasta affects the performance and the outcomes achieved by the company. It appears that, since private sectors are more concerned with performance leading to profit, as opposed to the public sectors, that will consequently lead to a distinction in terms of how Wasta transpires as a concept within each organization.

The final point of analysis in our research model is conflict management. To attain an accurate analysis and a desired outcome, we must thoroughly study, as well as analyze the tools used in solving conflict. Since conflict is interrelated to all its antecedents, it is necessary to obtain knowledge regarding the general approach and means through which conflict is solved. Thus, in addition to the theoretical approaches previously mentioned in our literature review, enquiring about the tools used in conflict management leads to a clearer vision on

the unit of conflict management. This particular point of analysis was realized by asking our interviewees question 6: "Do you have tools to solve conflict within groups?"

Most of the interviewees agreed on the point of having open communication as the tool to solve conflict. One of our respondents stressed that: "The only tool that works so far is open communication. As long as people talk and they cover all points in a fair and unbiased manner, this should be a sufficient means of conflict management." To further verify this point, interviewee 2 stated that: "The purpose of open communication is to enable awareness in relation to each person's opinion, whether it is about a task or a personal conflict. In order to assist in the process of being a fair manager."

On the other hand, a respondent of ours declared that there is no formal or written tool to solve conflict, and so, according to the nature of each conflict, they sit and talk. In case this is not sufficient enough to solve or manage the conflict, interviewee 3 explained that, "the conflict is to be taken to a higher level of supervision and management." On the contrary, interviewee 4 proposed that they have meetings to tackle the problem, in order to figure out the solution rather than imposing one solution.

The most formal tool we detected was given by interviewee 5, who stated the following:

"Usually we apply what is known as 'personal-development talk' every year. This means you will be evaluated and will also evaluate others based on leadership style, management style, time management and technical skills. The evaluation is then followed by gathering objectives for the upcoming year, in order to ensure improvement in all the aspects noted, as well as a clear vision on the development of each individual receiving the evaluation. This is merely one of the tools we apply often. Another one of our commonly used approaches would be the 'open space policy'. As we mentioned previously, we are more result oriented, we also follow the capability maturity model integrated it keeps employees on the right path."

All that being considered, we may infer that the tools for solving conflict vary, be it from one company to another, or from one form of leadership to the other; it is ultimately dependent on the organization and its structure.

Interviewee 5 elaborated on the importance of focusing on the quality of the individuals hired, so as to guarantee sufficient performance within the company. Agreeing with interviewee 1 and 3, our respondent added:

"This is especially important in the private sector, because they are well aware of situations where you hire someone who is unqualified and you receive the blame for such action. At the end of the day, you want to hire someone to achieve a good outcome. I do not know about the public sector, but in the private sector we hire the best candidates because we want the performance to be better as well." This is not a certain tool to solve conflict but it is a precautionary measure that prevents a situation where there can be conflict created due to wrong choices of employees.

## Limitations and Recommendations

One limitation is that our study and research has been based upon the past fifteen years, and is therefore focused on that period. Also the underlying subject discussion has its challenges or limitations, as it involves several cultural constraints. The awareness of such topic is very limited within the Arab society.

For future recommendations, it would be more stimulating to study larger organizations, and their day-to-day activities, while observing the antecedents of conflict. Some of our interviewees also suggested that it would be beneficial to study parts of the public sector to see how the antecedents of conflict can play a role in public and governmental institutes.

## Conclusion

Our study shed the light on a new side of Nepotism, Wasta, and the role it plays within the antecedents of conflict. The factors that contribute to the conflict are essential within managerial contexts. Subsequently, it has become a topic widely discussed among researchers whether conflict may in fact produce a positive effect on the group performance, namely Simons and Peterson (2000), whereas others, such as Jehn (1995) disagree. With our qualitative research we have reached the conclusion that conflict can create positive and negative effects on group performance. Some of the interviewees expressed that, when conflict evolves, it can create positive and healthy competition. On the other hand, some interviewees stated that when conflict occurs it can lead to misinterpretations of thoughts, leading to hatred within the group members.

Pruitt and Rubin (1986) analyze that beliefs and background may play a role in creating conflict, and therefore, any factor related to background and beliefs is worth looking further into, in order to analyze their effects upon conflict. Since nepotism or the bigoted practice of hiring relatives and friends by a person in power or an authority figure, as a concept, is also in direct association with the backgrounds and beliefs of persons, studying Nepotism and analyzing its effect on conflict creation and management is of interest. Locally known as Wasta in the MENA region, Nepotism here is not merely restricted to such groups, but may involve strangers whom are connected to this authority figure in a way or another. Antecedents of conflict, such as Wasta and diversity, can play a role in conflict creation and management within private organizations. There is a positive and negative effect of those antecedents. Some people view Wasta as a positive aspect that leads to job recommendations, hence job opportunity creation. On the other hand, others perceive Wasta, when used in an unprofessional way, as a factor that creates conflict within group members in organizations. As for the second antecedent, which is diversity, some interviewees perceive it as a positive factor that supports learning from other people's experiences and ideas. Diversity can also create conflict, because of the miscommunication and misinterpretation between the members of a group.

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