

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

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1.0 Introduction

The concept of conflict is an integral part of human life. Wherever there is interaction, there is conflict. The term conflict may mean different things to different persons. It may be regarded as the disagreement or hostility between individuals or groups. It may even mean rivalry or competition or may be viewed as the perception of disagreement in the individuals.

Conflict is a disagreement between two or more individuals or groups, with each individual or a group trying to gain acceptance of its view or objectives over others.

In has been defined as the condition of objective incompatibility between values and goals, as the behaviour of deliberately interfering with answer's goal achievement and as emotionally in terms of hostility¹. Descriptive theorists have explained conflict behaviour in terms of objective conflict of interest, personal styles, reactions to threats, and cognitive distortions.

2.0 Levels of conflict

Managers should spend their time in dealing with conflict situations. Hence it is very important that managers understand the type of conflict that they have to deal with so that they can devise some standardized techniques in dealing with common characteristics of conflicts in each type or category. There are five different levels at which conflict may be found to exist in any organization².

1. Conflict within the individual
2. Conflict between the individual
3. Conflict between individuals and groups
4. Conflict between groups in the same organization.
5. Conflict between organizations.

2.1 Conflict within the individual

The analysis of conflict may start at the individual level itself. It may take place within an individual itself. The conflict within an individual is usually value related. A person may have a role conflict other than the value conflicts. For example, the role conflict which an individual experience when he is

confronted with two or more incompatible roles.

2.2 Conflicts between the individuals

Many people consider interpersonal conflicts as a serious problem. Therefore, there is a need to protect one's self-image and self-esteem from damage by others. There may be several forms of interpersonal conflicts, such as hierarchical conflict between various levels of management, functional conflicts between occupational specialists. Some conflicts may arise between supervisor - subordinate relationship. These conflicts may be called as vertical conflict³. Conversely some conflicts may arise among the persons at the same hierarchical level in the same function or in different functions. It is called as horizontal conflicts.

2.3 Conflict between individuals and groups

All members of the groups are expected to adhere certain norms of behaviour and operational standards, established by groups. The individual may want to remain within the group for social needs, but may disagree with the group methods or policy. For example: if a group is going on strike for some

reasons, but some members may not agree with these reasons or may be hesitated to go on strike, this may lead to cause conflict with the group⁴.

2.4 Conflict between groups

Conflict may occur within the group which constitutes two or more persons who interact in such a way that each person influences and is influenced by others. Groups exist in every organization and they affect the behaviour of their members. They may affect the behaviour of their members, other groups and the organization as a whole. For example, when the two departments / division of the same organization fight to get a larger share of some common resources⁵.

2.5 Conflict between organizations

This conflict may be between the buyer organizations and supplier organizations in respect of quantity, quality and delivery times of raw materials and other policy issues. It may occur when two units of the same industry fight with each other for a larger preparation of the same market. To ascertain the benefits of both types of organization. These conflicts should be resolved and managed properly.

3.0 Stages of conflict

Conflict process progresses through different stages. According to Pondy there are five stages in conflict, manifest conflict and conflict aftermath. It can be shown in the following diagram⁶.

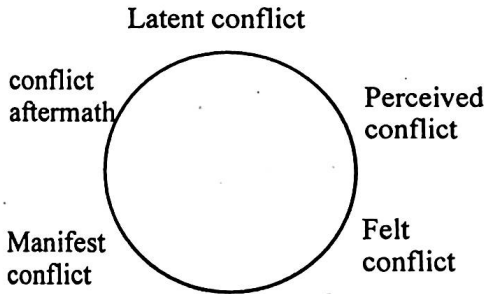


Figure -1

3.1 Latent conflict

This is the first stage in which only potential opposition exists between the parties. This means that all causes and sources of conflict analyzing hidden and covered, parties are not yet aware of them⁷.

3.2 Perceived conflict

This is the second stage in the process of conflict when parties become aware of the existence of the causes and sources of conflict and they begin perceiving the conflict. Sometimes people may begin perceiving a conflict even with out there existing any conditions of latent conflict⁸.

3.3 Felt conflict

This is the third stage in which a perceived conflict becomes emotionally involved in the conflict. If someone only perceives the conflict but does not feel it no dysfunctional consequences are likely to follow⁹:

3.4 Manifest conflict

This is the fourth stage when two parties to the conflict show a variety of conflictful behaviour such as open aggression, sabotage, apathy, withdrawal, work to rule, etc depending on the issues involves in the conflict and the standard that the parties may take¹⁰.

3.5 Conflict aftermath

This is the fifth and last stage. At this stage, attempts are made to resolve the conflict through conflict resolution mechanism. Depending on the nature of conflict resolution mechanism, either the conflict may be suppressed or resolved amicably. If the conflict is merely suppressed, the latent conditions of conflict may be aggravated and exploded in a more serious form. If the conflict is resolved amicably, a basis for cooperative behaviour is established between the parties¹¹.

4.0 Resolution strategies

Intentions help participants select their strategies. Once they have been chosen, the strategies implemented will have a substantial impact on the outcomes reached (actual winning or losing). This simplest strategies focus on the contrasting approaches of either cooperation or competition, but a widely used topology suggests that there are at least four clearly different strategies. Each of these represents different degree of concern for one's own outcomes and for another's results, and has a predictable outcome¹². The five strategies are:

4.1) Avoiding:- Physical or mental withdrawal from the conflict. This approach reflects a low concern for either party's outcomes and often results a lose - lose situation.

4.2) Smoothing:- Accommodating the other party's into rests. This approach places greatest emphasis on concern for others, usually to one's won detriment, resulting in a lose - win outcome.

4.3) Forcing:- Using power tactics to achieve a win. This strategy relies on aggressiveness and dominance to achieve personal goals at the expense of the concern for there party. The likely result is a win - lose situation¹³.

4.4) Compromising: Searching for middle ground, a being willing to give up something in exchange for gaining something else. This strategy reflects an moderate degree of concern for self and others, with no clear - cut outcome.

4.5) Confronting :- Facing the conflict directly and working it through to a mutually satisfactory resolution. Also known as problem solving or interpreting, this tactic seeks to maximize the achievement of both party's goals, resulting in win-win outcome. Thus, conflict resolution outcome can be presented in the diagram¹⁴.

Figure-2

Outcomes of conflict resolution

		Party B'S outcomes	
		Win	Win-Win
Party A'S Outcomes	Win	Win-Lose	Win-Win
	Lose	Lose-Lose	Lose-Win

According to the figure out of the four possible outcomes of conflict resolution, win - win situation is ideal as both parties feel satisfied. In lose-lose outcome, both

the parties feel cheated. In other two alternatives, only one party wins at the cost of the other, and the conflict becomes a zero-sum game. Such a situation may generate more conflicts in future.

5.0 Management of conflict

There are three views in managing conflicts in the organizations¹⁵.

- i) Traditional view
- ii) Behaviourial view
- iii) Integrations view

5.1 Traditional view

According to this view, all conflicts are dysfunctional and should, there fore, be avoided by the manager. This, however, is not correct. The manager who uses this approach always runs the risk of reducing the creativity of his organization. Some one has said that "when everyone in the organization is alike no one is thinking very much". In an atmosphere where differences are avoided, not only do new ideas appear less frequently but also ideas are likely to go unexamined and untested¹⁶. There is the genuine danger of the organization slipping unknowing highly into a rut of complacency.

5.2 Behaviourial view

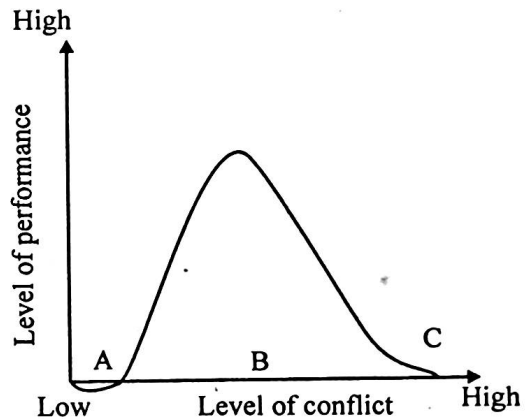
In this view, all conflicts are not dysfunctional, some may be even

functional and should, therefore be accepted by the manager.

5.3 Integrationist view

According to this view, a manager should not merely accept functional conflict, but must manager conflict. Management of conflict means maintaining it at an optimum level¹⁷.

Figure-3: Conflict and organizational performance.



As shown in figure very low and very high levels of conflict hinder organizational performance. The performance is maximum at point B which can be called the optimal level of conflict. To achieve this a manager must both stimulate conflict when it is very low and reduce it when it is very high¹⁸.

Situation	Level of conflict	Type of conflict	Organizations Internal characteristics	Performance outcome
A	Low or none	Dysfunctional	- Apathetic - stagnant - Non-responsive to change - Lack of new ideas	Low
B	Optimal	Functional	- viable -self -critical - innovative	High
C	High	Dysfunctional	-Disruptive - chaotic -uncooperative	

The following table summarizes an organization's internal characteristics associated with the three types of situations shown in the above figure.

the conflict

ii) His ability to select appropriately from a variety of styles of conflict resolution reduction.

6.0 Conclusion

A manager's ability to reduce a conflict effectively depends upon two factors:

i) His ability to diagnose and understand

Thus by avoiding the conflicts (three) the (factors) Management can achieve the organizational goals with fullest corporation of employees.

FOOT NOTES

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- 4) Ibid. p.8
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- 6) Pondy, L.R, "Organisational Conflict: Concepts and module Administrative Science", Quarterly, VI 12, No.2, 1976, p.296.
- 7) Ibid. p.299
- 8) Ibid. p.314
- 9) Ibid. p.316
- 10) Ibid. p. 317
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- 12) Evert Van de viert and Bris Kahanoff: Toward theory based measures of conflict Management Academy of Management Journal, March 1990, p.199.
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- 17) Prased, L.M, "Organisational Behaviour", Sultan Chand Sons, New Delhi, 2003, p.392.
- 18) Mike Johnson, "Management in the next Millennium", BH Ltd., Oxford, UK. 1995, p.47.

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