

9.3.2 Inter-Group conflict

It may be stated in the sense of organizational conflict. Causes for inter-group conflict may be summarized under four heads:

- i. absence of joint decision-making
- ii. difference in goals
- iii. difference in perception and
- iv. difference in goals as well as perception

Organization is comprising of different groups. Each group will put its urgency for having maximum share in the limited resources and press for the acceptance of its own time schedule for the performance of a task. If the wishes of a group in respect of resources and schedule are accepted, justice cannot be done to other groups, which will ultimately lead to organizational ineffectiveness. Joint decision-making is the only solution to resolve the conflict. The conflicting parties may sit together and discuss their own needs in the overall organizational perspective.

Difference in goals arises due to following considerations:

- i. Elements, which affect the commonality within the organization such as heterogeneity in groups.
- ii. Factors that affect the clarity and consistency of reward structure and.
- iii. Factors which affect comparability of reward structure.

Differences in perception causing inter group conflict arise as a result of—

- i. Members having different sources of information.
- ii. Different techniques of processing the information,
- iii. Different time horizons and
- iv. Difference in goals.

Resolutions of Inter Group conflict

- i. Solving the conflict through intervention and non-intervention approaches.
- ii. Reducing negative consequences of conflict,
- iii. Preventing inter-group conflict.

The conflict may be solved by resorting to intervention and non - intervention approaches. The non - intervention approach is that approach in which administrators and managers do not intervene an account of two reasons –

- i. they are uncertain about the possible consequences and
- ii. they do not want that conflict to exist in the organization. Consequently, they ignore the group conflict in the beginning. When this does not work, it is appropriate that the parties to conflict confront themselves and resolve the conflict without management. The process adopted by the parties to the conflict may fall under four major categories:

- i. **Problem solving:**

It may be successful through the agreement on a common goal. Once the goal is agreed to, the alternatives could be worked out with reference to the agreed goal. When the common goal is not agreed, the parties may be persuaded to adopt such flexible group sub-goals that they could be changed for achieving larger organizational objectives.

- ii. **Persuasion:**

“Persuasion and appeals to reason are abandoned in favor of compromise, threats, bluffs, gamesmanship and “ side payments”. In the event of failure of persuasion, bargaining may be resorted to.

- iii. **Bargaining:**

Bargaining may be stated as the process of give and take between the parties to conflict. Both parties agree to give in exchange for taking something. Sometimes, threats help in striking a bargain, e.g. In one university, the student's threat to boycott examinations lead to striking the bargain of postponement of examination.

- iv. **Politics:**

When both the parties take stiff attitude towards their respective goals and even outside interference is not able to alert win lose strategy, then the only alternative may be lose - lose. This is politics. In labour management conflict, when a strike



takes place or a lockout is resorted to, the management loses profit and the labour wages.

The intervention sometimes becomes inevitable for the management. The intervention strategies may be of three types: -

- a. Dealing with the symptoms of conflict.
- b. Attempting to settle the conflict and
- c. Seeking to eliminate the sources of conflict.

Dealing with symptoms involves two methods –

- a. Smoothing over it. Conflicting parties may be given rewards or incentives to control conflict and avoid open clashes and
- b. Repressing conflict or the use of coercive power. It means that the parties to the conflict may be given so much work that they do not have time to fight each other:

The negative consequences of the conflict may be reduced by

- a. Increasing inter-group contacts.
- b. Promoting contacts and negotiations between leaders.
- c. Propaganda.
- d. Distraction

All these tactics are instructively appealing but are relatively ineffective.

Inter-group conflicts could be prevented by establishing clear, operational goals of the organization. These goals will take away group's energy from conflict towards achievement of these goals. In the process they will develop mutual co-operation. They may also be prevented through better communications and interactions between the groups. In this process, there ought to be rotation of members in the group so that they could experience the problems themselves and take suitable steps to prevent them. Healthy competition among groups may also prevent conflict.

Check your Progress - 9.3

- 1) Identify the causes of Individual conflict.

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- 2) Identify the causes of organizational conflict.

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9.4 TYPES OF ORGANIZATIONAL CONFLICT

Litterer has suggested four causes of Organizational Conflict. They are:

- i. Incompatible means or incompatible resource allocations among individuals, groups or departments.
- ii. Incompatible goal situation.
- iii. Problem of status incongruities and
- iv. Difference in perception

Structurally, OC could be divided under four heads.

- i. Hierarchical conflict
- ii. Functional conflict

- iii. Line staff conflict
- iv. Formal informal conflict

Hierarchical conflict is that conflict which exists among different levels of organization, e.g. The level of top management may conflict with the level of middle management. When conflict exists between various functional departments of the organization, it is called functional conflict, e.g., The production department is in conflict with the marketing department.

Line staff conflict may be stated as the conflict between members of line and members of staff. Since the members of staff do not have any authority over the persons in line, conflict is generated.

Where the conflict exists between the formal and informal organizations, it is known as formal informal conflict. Letterer has suggested three basic strategies to reduce organizational conflict,

- i. Buffers may be erected between conflicting parties. It has been described in the study of restaurant industry by White.
- ii. The organizational development techniques may help the parties to conflict to develop better insights into themselves and others.
- iii. Redesigning of organizational structure so as to reduce the conflict.

9.4.1 Causes of Conflict

The causes of conflict within an organization may be divided under the following heads:

i. Interdependence among departments and groups.

Whereas interdependent is the genesis of the modern systems approach, it causes conflicts more often among departments and groups. Mutual interdependence causes conflict when resources are limited within the organization. With limited resources every department or group wants to project its need as indispensable.

The department or the group which manages greater share by manipulation, causes dissatisfaction in the department, which may have been deprived of even its legitimate needs. It is not possible to evolve a foolproof method of distributing equally or even equitably the limited resources of the organization in the form of money, personnel and equipment among different departments of organizations. Hence, conflict will automatically arise till the resource position improves. As the dependence on the resources increases, the incidence of conflict is ought increase unchecked. The other source of conflict is the interdependence in timing of the activities. Sometimes, the performance of one department / group depends on the completion of the task by another department / group within the schedule. If one fails to complete the task in time, the other department cannot start and complete its activities. Time is also limited at the hands of individuals. Within the limited time factor, different activities are expected to be performed within the time constraint. The root cause of conflict is interdependence, which occurs due to specialization. Greater specialization, greater the interdependence and greater causes of conflict internally within the organization. The conflict arising out of specialization becomes all the more acute if the external environments are not properly predicted.

ii. Difference in Goals

Difference in goals among different sub-units or departments may cause conflict. This difference among sub unit-goals is related to four characteristics of the organizations:

- a. mutual dependence on limited resources.
- b. competitive reward systems.
- c. differences in individual goals and
- d. differences in organizational operating goals.

When resources are limited and the operating level workers demand high wages, a conflict may arise between the operating force and the management. The management considers the demand as illegitimate and untimely in the context of the resource constraint. Competitive reward system also generates conflict among different units and groups. Any group, which presses hard, and succeeds in getting it, will cause conflict among other member of the group.

Difference in individual goals also brings in conflict in the organization. Persons having heterogeneous individuals depending on their different life styles, socio political background and attitudinal developments are apt to have differing individual goals. This difference is manifested even in the departmental or group goals. No uniformity could be arrived at on account of latent heterogeneity.

Inter-group conflict also arises when operational goals of the organization are not objectively and clearly laid down. The conflicting groups justify their differences on the alibi of subjectivity in operational goals. It enjoys on the planners to lay down even the operation goals specifically and objectively.

iii. Differences in Perceptions

Perceptions may be stated as the process of receiving information through different senses which is interpreted and put in an organized pattern on the basis of past experience. Perception is a psychological element of human personality, which depends on the information and communication system on one hand and the personality development of the people on the other. Personality, having psycho – physical elements, is cast in the world of the environments in which the person has been brought up. Hence, different people and groups have different perceptions about certain events and activities in the organization. People having perception of callous attitude towards work are apt to conflict with people having perception of work as worship. Perception also depends on the source of flow of information. Time horizon also contributes to difference in perceptions. Difference in the time horizon is also related to position occupied by the person in the organization and the tasks performed by people in different units, sections and departments.

Inter-group conflicts in organizations arise on account of three important characteristics of modern organizations.

They are

- i. Interdependence
- ii. Differences in goals and
- iii. Differences in perceptions among the groups in the organization.

9.4.2 Other sources of conflict

They include

i. One way task dependence

One way instead of mutual task dependence increases the potential of conflict between individuals, groups, and units in the organization. One way dependence means imbalance in power. The group having power will be dominant and will have little incentive to co-operate with the subordinate group. Conflict between groups remains contained so long as the power balance is maintained. Whenever the imbalance occurs, conflicts arise. Generally, the subordinate department is forced to complete the incomplete task left by the dominant department.

ii. High Horizontal differentiation

Differing time perspectives of different groups lead to conflict between the units and the departments. "High Horizontal differentiation leads to different goals, time orientations and management philosophies between units".

iii. Low formalization

Formalization in the form of rules and regulations standardizes the pattern of behaviour of individuals. The roles of individuals and units are well defined in unmistakable terms, which reduce the chances of conflict. Conversely, when formalization is at low level, the chances of disputes over roles, functions and jurisdiction are less.

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Organizational Behaviour / 164

iv. Differences in Evaluation criteria and Reward systems

Difference in the criteria for evaluation exists even within a business organization. Production is rewarded for fewer runs whereas sales is complemented for the speed which entails a large number of runs. This shows that the criterion of evaluation is different in two departments of the same organization.

v. Status Incongruence

Status in an organization is determined in relation to pay, education, competence and hierarchy of status in an organization. Whenever there is any incongruence between the status and the role assigned to him in any organization, conflict is apt to rise.

vi. Role Dissatisfaction

When a person having competence and choice for a certain role is assigned a different role and the role of his preference is assigned to a different person, the conflict is bound to occur. This will also provide status incongruence, which may be one of the many factors, which generate dissatisfaction among the individuals and groups. All these factors lead to conflict in an organization.