

Conflict Management

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9.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter you should be able to:

- ❖ Define conflict
- ❖ Differentiate between Individual and organizational conflict
- ❖ Identify the reasons for conflict
- ❖ Explain various techniques to resolve conflict.

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Conflict has been defined by writers in different ways. Conflict may, however, be defined as a situation in which there is a breakdown in decision making owing to irrational and / or incompatible stand taken by one or all parties concerned with decision-making.

Characteristics of Conflict

- Conflict leads to disruption or impairing the work of the organization.
- Conflict is the function of opposite views held by the parties to dispute. Even a rational stand by one party becomes incompatible to the irrational stand taken by another party. The situation becomes all the more vulnerable, when both parties stick to their respective irrational stand.
- Breakdown in decision-making is consequence of incompatibility in the behaviour of the parties to a certain situation existing in the organization.

There may be three main classes of conflict phenomena

- Individual conflict i.e. conflict in individual decision-making.
- Organizational conflict i.e. individual or group conflict within an organization. This may also be called intra-organizational conflict and
- Inter-organizational conflict i.e. conflict between the two organizations.

9.2 INDIVIDUAL CONFLICT

Conflict arises within an individual wherever his drives and motives are blocked or he is confronted with competing roles and goals and he is unable to take decisions. Conflict in the individual is caused by:

9.2.1 Unacceptability

An individual knows different alternatives. He knows the pattern of preference other words, he knows the probability of each alternative. Since the preferred alter

not good and satisfactory to him; he is unable to accept it. Unacceptability is subjective because the alternative unacceptable to one may be acceptable to another. It is relevant to state that, when conflict is perceived, it could be reduced by generating motivation. When the alternative is unacceptable to the individual, he will search for new alternatives. His search for acceptable alternative continues. In spite of best of efforts if he comes across with an acceptable alternative, he may have to revise the basis of unacceptabilities.

9.2.2 Incomparability

The individual knows the probability of distribution of the alternatives but he is unable to take decision because the outcomes are incomparable. When the results are not comparable, no decision could be taken. Similarly, an individual is also unable to make proper comparison of the alternatives. Comparison requires clarity, technique of comparison including assigning weights to different components, rationality in attitude and behaviour and the competence to perform the task. The procedure of comparison depends also on the clarity and decisiveness of the individual regarding the minimum standard of achievement. If the individual has a vacillating attitude without much clarity as to the expectancy, he will not be able to make comparison. The state of incomparability causes lot of tension and conflict to the individual.

9.2.3 Uncertainty

Uncertainty is about the alternative to the environments operating within and without the organization. If the environments could be properly predicted, the behaviour of the people regarding acceptability of the alternative and efficiency of the alternative in such situation could be ascertained with certainty. In a state of uncertainty, the individual feels frustrated which is ultimately reflected in conflict. The element of uncertainty may be reduced with the quantum of past experience in decision situation. Further, lesser the complexity in the decision situation more the likelihood of reduction in uncertainty.

Individual conflict arises due to:

i. Frustration

When motivated drives of an individual are blocked before reaching the goal, it causes frustration.

Frustration may be stated as the highest level of dissatisfaction, which generates conflict in the individual. The blocks which impede the course of reaching the goal may either be overt (outward or physical) or covert (inward, mental or socio psychological). Frustration leads to defence mechanism which has been broadly classified under four heads.

- a. aggression,
- b. withdrawal,
- c. fixation and
- d. compromise.

ii. Goal conflict

When an individual is unable to take decision about the goal to be achieved either due to positive and negative features existing in the goals or the existence of two or more competing goals, it causes lot of conflict in the individual. In the context three types of goal conflicts have been identified as:

- a. **Approach:** It is a situation, which arises when an individual approaches two or more positive but equally exclusive goals. He cannot make choice as to which one is better of the two. For instance, a person has two equally attractive jobs. It is a difficult task to make a choice by the person. This problem could be solved with the help of Leon Festinger's well-known theory of "cognitive dissonance". Dissonance means psychological discomfort or conflict. The individual may reduce dissonance by cognition of a job which is decidedly better than the other. Once he is convin



that job is the right choice, he would avoid all evidence to argument, which may go to change his opinion.

- b. Approach avoidance conflict:** It is a situation in which a single goal has both the positive as well as negative characteristics. He is motivated to approach the goal because of the positive characteristics, but simultaneously impelled to avoid it because of the negative characteristics. In this approach the conflict is at the maximum when the approach avoidance curves meet each other.

The decision could be taken to resolve the conflict by looking at the gradients of avoidance and approach elements. If the gradient of any of them is steeper beyond the equilibrium point "K", it means the other one will be over it. Hence the goal is accepted because the approach gradient having positive elements is less steep and is above the avoidance gradient having negative element. In figure (b) the goal is avoided because beyond equilibrium the gradient of approach is steeper than the avoidance. In other words, avoidance out weights approach, hence the goal is rejected.

- c. Avoidance:** Avoidance is a situation in which the individual is motivated to avoid two or more independent goals having negative elements. It is more like the approach-approach but with a difference. Ordinarily if both the goals are negative it is comparatively easier to resolve conflict by avoiding both of them. Conversely, in certain situations, the person cannot avoid both the goals. In such a situation, the goal having comparatively lesser negative element may be retained and the other abandoned.

iii. Role conflict

Every individual plays a number of roles in social and organizational situation. In a social settings, he plays the role of a father, a son, a husband, a brother, a neighbour etc. There ought to be variation in these roles, which are different from one another. A conflict arises when his individual expectations are different from others while playing the role. e.g. A person playing the role of a father expects that his son should be obedient, respectful and submissive. But, when he plays the role of a son in relation to his father, his expectations are entirely different. He wants to be assertive, independent and choosy in obeying or not obeying the command of his father. This causes role conflict.

When a person is playing a role and the expectations are different by others, role conflict arises.

Role conflict depends on :

- a awareness of role conflict,
- b. acceptance of conflicting job pressures,
- c. ability to tolerate stress, and
- d. general personality make up.

Role conflict may be resolved, apart from the factors enumerated above, by an individual by playing the role according to conviction and the norms of justice and fairplay. He will play the role in accordance with standardized and objective pattern of expectation in relation to himself and by others.

9.3 ORGANIZATION CONFLICT

It may be discussed under two heads.

9.3.1 Interpersonal conflict

Organization is composed of individuals and groups operating at different levels. The conflict arises between individual and individual that has been described as "Johari Windows" by Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham. The "Johari Window" has the following four cells-



Open Self	Hidden Self
Blind Self	Undiscovered Self

The intersection among individuals depends to a large extent on the four cells. Under the open self, the person knows about himself and others. In this state, the individual knows about the reaction of the other while dealing with him. He is clear about himself also. Hence, the problems of uncertainty, incomparability and unacceptability could be avoided. Hidden self is a situation in which the person knows about himself but does not know about the other. The other has kept his feelings, attitudes and reactions hidden with the result that the potential of interpersonal conflict increases. Blind self is a situation in which the person knows about the other but does not know about himself. Consequently, the person may inadvertently, by his acts and expression of views, cause irritation to the other, which may ultimately lead to interpersonal conflict.

Undiscovered self is a highly vulnerable situation in which the person neither knows about himself nor about the other. Hence, the chances of interpersonal conflict are the highest.

Resolution of Interpersonal conflict

Following strategies have been identified by Alan C. Filley, Robert J. House and Steven Kerr and are described as:

- a. **Lose - lose:** "Lose - lose" is that approach in which both the parties lose. One of the common forms of strategy is the compromise decision in which both parties leave their stand and relent to a commonly acceptable formula. The next situation may be that, one party may be paid off to leave his stand. The other approach may be use of an outsider, the arbitrator, to settle the dispute between the parties. Finally, he may resolve the conflict within prescribed rules and procedures in which both may be required to lose. Lose - lose strategies is based on the premise that some sort of compromise could be struck in which both leave the stands taken by them so that one is not a victor and the other the vanquished.
- b. **Win-lose:** "Win lose" is the strategy that creates a highly competitive type of situation. In this situation, both the parties try to marshal all forces to register a win against his opponent. In this race, rationality is side tracked and emotions dominate. Emotions are so surcharged that the parties to the conflict may go to any extent to secure victory over the opponent. This type of strategy is more prevalent in superior-subordinate relationship, line staff conflict and union management relations.
- c. **Win - win:** "Win - win" is the strategy, which is like "I am OK and you are OK". It is based on rationality of thinking and maturity in behaviour on the part of the conflicting parties. It may take the functional aspect of win - lose strategy. In this strategy, the needs of both the parties are met and both feel satisfied. Win win decision strategies are associated with better judgements, favourable organization experience and more favourable bargains".

This strategy may be stated as the ideal, and should be strived by management in resolving interpersonal conflict.