CONFLICT MANAGMENT

❖ WHAT IS CONFLICT?

- A conflict may involve two or more than two interested and interdependent parties in a situation of a zero or non-zero sum game.

- **A conflict is a clash of interests** when there is the possibility of capability failure or contestability failure, which prevents a party from exercising certain moral or lawful rights or enjoying certain freedom for the achievement of the desired goal.

- **A conflict can be interpreted as a sort of intergroup policy externality, which acts as an impediment in the realization of the desideratum.** A conflict is likely to ensue when the existing institutional behavioural pattern, culture or custom of a society is violated, devastated or discredited by the covert or overt action of some party or parties.

- **A conflict may also start as a principal-agent problem** in some cases where the interests are diametrically opposite.

- A conflict may be defined as a situation where there may be a clash of interests between the goals pursued by two different groups of people who are otherwise mutually interdependent in some way or another.

❖ TYPES OF CONFLICT

Conflicts can broadly be divided into four main categories:

• Economic

• Political

• Social

• Methodological conflicts

- **ECONOMIC CONFLICT:**

some can include conflicts due to exploitation and economic inequalities. Conflicts between labour and capital, between the rich and the poor, between highly developed and backward regions, between the rural and urban areas are conflicts that are economic in nature. Many of the conflicts in the economic domain are rooted in economic injustice and exploitation.

- **SOCIAL CONFLICT:**

Social conflict also involved unequal rights and freedom among the various social classes. Some of the social conflicts were economic in nature

Some of the social evils in India, including untouchability, the dowry system, bonded labour, gender conflict, Hindu-Muslim conflict, racial prejudices and so forth, evidently, were firmly institutionalized. Social conflicts are conflicts between man-made practices and divine dispensation, and are a reflection of the disequilibrium between materialism and spiritualism.

• POLITICAL

Social injustice and political injustice sustain and reinforce each other in a significant way, particularly in a system where the state is exploitative in nature and plays a collusive role. At times, higher obligation comes into conflict with political obligations.

• METHODOLOGICAL CONFLICTS

There can be another set of conflicts, called methodological conflicts in the absence of a better classificatory concept. Some of the major conflicts in this category are: conflict between tradition and modernity, methodological conflict as end-means conflict, conflict between temporal order and inter-temporal order and conflict between rationality and morality.

❖ NATURE, ISSUES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF CONFLICTS

- A conflict may be a two-party or multi-party phenomenon. A conflict may also be between the inner world and the overt behaviour of a person.

- The following features and facts become predominant in conflicts:

- **Incompatibility** There may be incompatibility between the two conflicting parties. This may be due to differences in attitude, values, interest and methods.

- **Different Perspectives and Goals** The two parties may be having the same ideas, attitudes and value system, but they may have different goals and objectives.

- **Different Values** All other things remaining the same between the two contending parties, conflict arises simply because of their differing value systems.

- **Different Techniques** There may be a conflict because the two parties propose two different techniques to solve the problem. One party may like confrontation and the other may prefer cooperation. So the inability to choose a clear-cut solution (action plan) may lead to a conflict.

- **Different Facts** A conflict may arise simply by a mistake, misunderstanding or misrepresentation of facts between the two persons or parties. The fact of the matter may also be an issue. Concepts such as truth, beauty and justice and so on cannot be uniquely defined, and such things may be the source of conflict.

❖ METHODS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION

• **Confrontation and Violence**

Generally, a very powerful party resorts to confrontation and violence. However, violence begets violence, and in the process, there may be chances of bloodshed, loss of property and loss of life and so on. Violence is never a permanent method for conflict resolution.

• **Smoothing**

The technique of smoothing is a process of playing down the differences between the conflicting parties, and if both the parties choose this technique, there may be a chance of eliminating the existing differences. The differences can be sorted out either by the parties, or by a middleman or an arbiter.

- **Sacrifice, Withdrawal and Avoidance**

If one of the conflicting parties sincerely tries to resolve the crisis, it will not be difficult to do so. In such a situation, it is better to make some sacrifices in terms of the imposed demand or conditions, make withdrawal and practice avoiding a rigid stance. Conflict resolution demands that either one of the parties or both the parties make some sacrifices. This is helpful to make a trade-off or compromise.

- **Negotiations and Persuasion**

It is necessary, first of all, to try to negotiate and persuade. Negotiation is a process of bargaining. This is an amicable method of resolving conflicts, either directly or through a mediator or an arbitrator. The mediator chosen should be sympathetic, neutral and acceptable to both the parties concerned. In such a method, there has to be some sacrifice from both parties. In a conflict that involves negative externality, conflict resolution is easily possible if there are well-defined property rights and the transaction cost is very low or zero.

- **Satyagraha and Non-Violence**

If, however, negotiation fails to achieve the desired result, there can be protest in the form of strikes (hartal), civil disobedience or civil resistance. Gandhi considered all these forms of protest to be just actions if the order from the higher authority is found to be repugnant to rights, freedom, rationality and morality. Gandhi himself participated in many such strikes and civil disobedience movements, such as the Dandi March, Quit India Movement.

- **Cooperation and Compromise**

The principle of cooperation plays a very critical role in conflict management. Gandhi had enormous faith in human rationality. He, like Freud, believed that human beings are basically innocent and good; nobody is born a criminal, but it is the environment and circumstances that are mostly the responsible factors.

- **Education**

The basic purpose of education is to endow people with the power to distinguish between good and evil, and to inculcate virtues, morality and philanthropic qualities. . Education intensifies both rationality and morality, which are immensely helpful for conflict resolution.

- **Organizational and Institutional Reforms**

Organizational and institutional reforms are also essential for conflict resolution. In this context, Gandhi wanted to bring about suitable institutional and organizational changes in the existing socio-economic institutions and practices, such as the zamindary (landed aristocracy) system, capitalist system of industrial organization and so forth. If the decentralized power belongs to people, there would be fewer chances of its misuse and mismanagement. The purpose of institutional changes and decentralization of power is to control the greed and e

- **Prisoners' Dilemma and Cooperation Threshold**

The prisoners' dilemma (PD) model is a typical game theoretical model, which can show that although in a two-party zero sum game each party adopts a dominant strategy, it cannot secure maximum pay-off unless the parties cooperate. Negotiations provide a way out for the deadlock, and find a possible means for resolution of conflict. The concept of co-operation threshold is important to know how far it is possible to have a co-operative solution. Threshold is the degree of certainty of achieving a solution based on co-operation

❖ CONFLICTS IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

- Conflict resolution involves many stages and various means and modus operandi, particularly when the conflict is between two social groups.

- Sometimes, it is possible that the parties do not know for sure which instrument of conflict resolution would be the most appropriate and successful to achieve the desired goal, and there may be intra-party conflict in the matter of use of the instrument.

- Even if a particular instrument or means is chosen by a majority of the supporters, there may still be the possibility of conflict about the timing, the modus operandi and other details.

- The non-violent method, although considered the best by Gandhi, has many limitations in the practical world. For instance, it may be regarded by the opponent as posing no threat to his or her action and policy.

- The non-violent method of conflict resolution does not evoke any immediate interest from the other party, and it may take a long time to resolve the conflict. In many cases, it may not be a successful strategy at all to settle the dispute.

- There may also arise conflicts about the acceptability of the different trade-off packages. This conflict will involve not only inter-group conflict but also intra-group dissensions; and at times, the situation may be so convoluted that no bilaterally acceptable resolution can be worked out.