

ITE 3652 Organizational Behavior

Lesson 13 – Conflict Management

1.0 What is a conflict?

We are very familiar the word conflict! Conflict is serious disagreement and argument about something important. If two or more people are in conflict, they have had a serious disagreement or argument and have not yet reached agreement. Conflict can be seen in many places in the day today life. Starting from home front up to the higher governing body of the country, conflict can be seen. This is even applicable to the organizational environment. Therefore, this lesson is to discuss about the conflict and how to manage the conflicts.

2.0 Reasons for Organisational Conflicts

There can be many reasons for conflicts to be occur in organisaions. This can be related to internal or external factors. Mainly conflicts occurs between co-workers and between managers and employees. Three key reasons for conflict are

- Incompatibility of goals – Goals are prime directives of every organization. Sometimes these goals are not clear for parties such as employees, managers, owners. Due to the incompatibility, conflicts can be arising between the said parties in different occasions. It will affect to the decision-making process, organsational performances or customer satisfaction.
- Differences over interpretations of facts – When working in office environment, facts are pretty important to carry out different tasks effectively. Sometimes these facts are being misinterpreted by parties. This may a reason for a conflict.
- Disagreements based on behavioral expectations – Employee behavior is also another key element for conflict. Every member of an organization, possesses different personality, which plays a crucial role in resolving conflict in an organization. Every employee has his or her won behavior or life pattern. Some party may or may not like the style of these individuals. Conflict can be occur due to the pattern of dress, working hours, working pattern, communication, etc.
- Scarcity of Resources: One of the main reason for occurence of conflict in an organization is the inadequacy of resources like time, money, materials etc. due to which members of the organization compete with each other, leading to conflict between them.

- **Conflict of Interest:** When there is a disorientation between the personal goals of the individual and the goals of the organization, conflict of interest arises, as the individual may fight for his personal goals, which hinders the overall success of the project.

Conflicts alleviate at the workplace due to individual and inter-individual factors. Individual related causes entails attitudes, beliefs, personality orientation and human frailties. Inter-individual conflicts arise when a manager breaches norms of the organization.

3.0 Different Types of Conflicts

There are two main types of conflicts namely task or process conflict and interpersonal conflicts.

Task Conflict

Task conflicts occurs over content and goals of the work. Task conflicts involves concrete issues related to employees' work assignments. These conflicts can be a disputes about how to divide up resources, differences of opinion on procedures and policies, managing expectations at work, and judgments and interpretation of facts. Task conflict may appear to be the simplest to resolve.

Relationship Conflict

Conflict based on interpersonal relationships. The relationship conflict, arises from differences in personality, style, matters of taste, and even conflict styles. In organizations, people who would not ordinarily meet in real life are often thrown together and must try to get along. It's no surprise, then, that relationship conflict can be common in organizations. This may involve conflict between two managers who are competing for limited capital and manpower resources.

The relationship conflicts can be occurs between

- Employees and their co-workers
- Employees and Managers
- Between Managers
- Between groups

There are many remedial measures that the organisaions are taking to minimize the conflict occurs between people and conflicts over the task or process. These remedial measures are depend upon the nature of the work, type of people, organizational culture, leadership styles, etc.

4.0 The Conflict Process

The conflict too occurs as a process. This process has many stages. Figure 1 shows the conflict process.

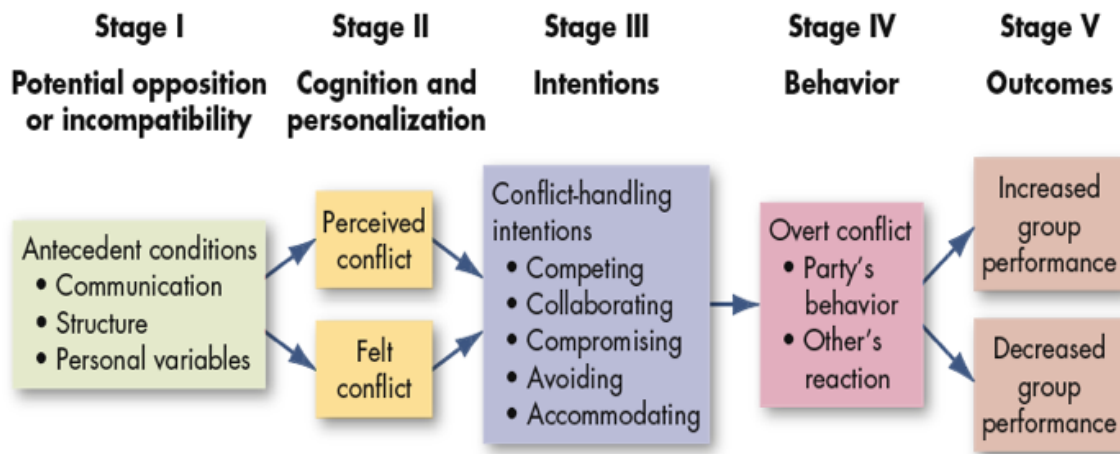


Figure 1 : Conflict Process

Stage 1 – Potential opposition or incompatibility

Stage one of the conflict process is the potential opposition or incompatibility. This situation may arise due to several reasons. This also can be interpreted as conditions that create opportunities for conflict to arise. Communication is one of the major problems and it can occur due to semantic difficulties, misunderstandings, and “noise”. At the same time conflict can occur regarding the structure of the organization. Size and specialization of jobs, Jurisdictional clarity/ambiguity, Member/goal incompatibility, Leadership styles (close or participative), Reward systems (win-lose), Dependence/interdependence of groups. Personal variables are also another reason.

Stage II: Cognition and Personalization

There are two sides in this stage. The first is perceived conflict and second is felt conflict.

Perceived Conflict- Awareness by one or more parties of the existence of conditions that create opportunities for conflict to arise.

Felt Conflict - Emotional involvement in a conflict creating anxiety, tenseness, frustration, or hostility.

Stage III: Intentions

Intentions are decisions to act in a given way, intentions intervene between people's perception and emotions and their overt behavior. Using two dimensions cooperativeness (the degree to which one party attempts to satisfy the other party's concerns) and assertiveness (the degree to which one party attempts to satisfy his or her concerns) five conflict-handling intentions can be identified.

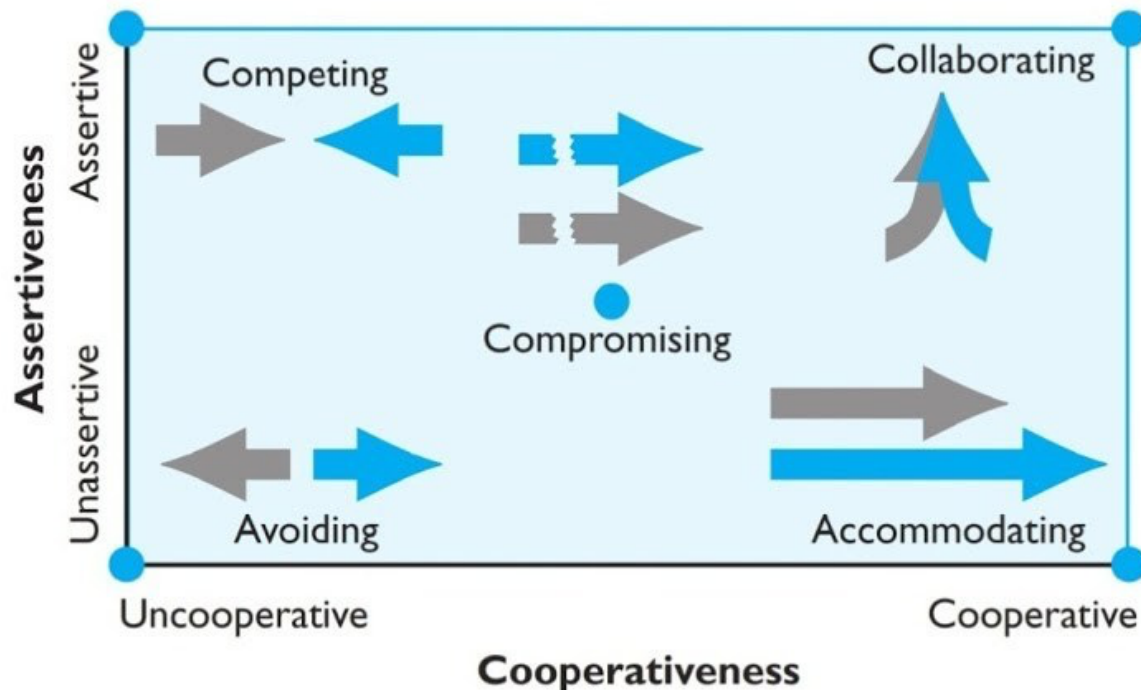


Figure 2: Conflict-handling intentions

As per the fig 2, there are 5 conflict-handling intentions;

- Competing (I Win, You Lose),
- Collaborating (I Win, You Win),
- Avoiding (No Winners, No Losers),
- Accommodating (I lose, You win), and
- Compromising (You Bend, I Bend).

Stage IV: Behavior

This is a stage where conflict becomes visible. The behavior stage includes the statements, actions, and reactions made by the conflicting parties. These conflict behaviors are usually overt

attempts to implement each party's intentions. When most people think of conflict situations, they tend to focus on Stage 4.

Stage 5: Outcomes

The action-reaction interplay between the conflicting parties results in consequences. These outcomes may be functional in that the conflict results in an improvement in the group's performance, or dysfunctional in that it hinders group performance.

5.0 Conflict Management Methods

In the workplace, conflicts are common and inevitable. We have discussed the conflict process in above. Different stakeholders may have different priorities; conflicts may involve team members, departments, projects, organization and client, boss and subordinate, organization needs vs. personal needs. Let's discuss some important conflict management methods that can be used in organisations.

<i>Conflict Management Method</i>	<i>Description</i>
Problem solving	Face to face meetings with the conflicting parties. Able to identify the problems and resolving it through open discussions
Superordinate goals	Create shared goals for conflicting parties. Here both parties cannot be attained without cooperation of conflicting parties
Expansion of resources	Scarcity of resources – money/ promotion/ opportunities/ office facilities – can create win/win solution
Avoidance	Withdrawal from or suppression of the conflict
Smoothing	Emphasising the common interest of the conflicting parties
Compromise	Each party to the conflict gives up something of value
Authoritative command	Management uses its formal authority to resolve the conflict and then communicate its desires to the parties involved
Altering the human variable	Use behavioural change techniques – human relations training to alter attitudes and behavior of conflicting parties

Altering the structural variables	Formal organisational structure – job redesign/ transfer/ coordination
Communication	Using ambiguous or threatening messages to increase the conflict level
Bringing in outsiders	Add more group members who's background, values, attitude or managerial styles differ from present members
Restructuring the organisation	Altering rules/ increasing interdependence making structural changes disrupt the status quo
Appointing a devil's advocate	Designing a critic to purposely argue against the majorities position held in the group.

6.0 Benefits of Better Conflict Management

Conflict resolution allows for constructive change to occur. Although it might be easier in the short term to leave things as they are, this struggle helps everyone involved in the conflict to work through the problem while developing stronger relationships.

Functional Outcomes from Conflict

- Increased group performance
- Improved quality of decisions
- Stimulation of creativity and innovation
- Encouragement of interest and curiosity
- Provision of a medium for problem-solving
- Creation of an environment for self-evaluation and change

Dysfunctional Outcomes from Conflict

- Development of discontent
- Reduced group effectiveness
- Slow down communication

- Reduced group cohesiveness
- Infighting among group members overcomes group goals

7.0 Lesson Summary

Conflicts can be seen in everywhere. It is not strange to the workplace environment too. This lesson discussed about the what is a conflict and how to recognize a conflict. The lesson has discussed the types of conflicts and its nature. At the same time conflict process has also identified with relevant examples. The conflict management techniques were also discussed. Finally, the lesson has described the functional and dysfunctional benefits of conflicts.