



CONFLICT MANAGEMENT



MEANING OF CONFLICT

A **conflict** is a struggle and a clash of interest, opinion, or even principles. Conflict is a disagreement and argument about something important. If two people or groups are in conflict, they have had a serious disagreement or argument and have not yet reached to agreement.

The dissimilarity in the interests, thought processes, needs, attitudes of individuals result in a conflict. It is defined as a clash among individuals resulting in verbal disagreements and tensions.


In a layman's language conflict is nothing but a fight or argument either between two individuals or among group members. Disagreements among individuals lead to conflicts and fights. Conflict arises whenever individuals have different values, opinions, needs, interests and are unable to find a middle way.

LET US UNDERSTAND CONFLICT IN A BETTER WAY

Tim and Joe were working in the same team and were best of friends. One fine day, they were asked to give their inputs on a particular project assigned to them by their superior. There was a major clash in their understanding of the project and both could not agree to each other's opinions. Tim wanted to execute the project in a particular way which did not go well with Joe. The outcome of the difference in their opinions was a conflict between the two and now both of them just can't stand each other.

Answer- The dissimilarity in the interest, thought process, nature and attitude of Tim and Joe gave rise to a conflict between the two.

Conflict is defined as a clash between individuals arising out of a difference in thought process, attitudes, understanding, interests, requirements and even sometimes perceptions. A conflict results in heated arguments, physical abuses and definitely loss of peace and harmony. A conflict can actually change relationships. Friends can become foes as a result of conflict just as in the case of Tim and Joe.



A Conflict not only can arise between individuals but also among countries, political parties and states as well. A small conflict not controlled at the correct time may lead to a large war and rifts among countries leading to major unrest and disharmony.

It is a well known fact that neighbours are our biggest assets as they always stand by us whenever we need them. Let us take the example of India and China or for that matter India and Pakistan. India and Pakistan are twin sisters as there is hardly any difference in the culture, religion, climatic conditions, eating habits of the people staying in both the countries, but still the two countries are always at loggerheads and the reason is actually unknown. Small issues between the two countries have triggered a conflict between them which has now become a major concern for both the countries.

Misunderstandings as well as ego clashes also lead to conflicts. Every individual has a different way to look at things and react to various situations.

ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF CONFLICT

Mike wanted to meet Henry at the church. He called up Henry and following was the conversation between them.

Mike - "Henry, I want to meet you tomorrow at 9"

Henry tried Mike's number a several times but could not speak to him. Mike waited the whole day for Henry and finally there was a major fight between them. For Mike 9 meant 9 in the morning whereas Henry misunderstood it for 9 in the evening and hence a major conflict between the two. It is always advisable to be very clear and very specific to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts. Any feedback or suggestion by an individual might not go very well with other individual leading to severe displeasure. It might hurt the ego of the other person resulting in a fight and major disagreement.

PHASES OF CONFLICT

A conflict has five phases.

Prelude to conflict - It involves all the factors which possibly arise a conflict among individuals. Lack of coordination, differences in interests, dissimilarity in cultural, religion, educational background all are instrumental in arising a conflict.

Triggering Event - No conflict can arise on its own. There has to be an event which triggers the conflict. Jenny and Ali never got along very well with each other. They were from different cultural backgrounds, a very strong factor for possibility of a conflict. Ali was in the mid of a presentation when Jenny stood up and criticized him for the lack of relevant content in his presentation, thus triggering the conflict between them.

Initiation Phase - Initiation phase is actually the phase when the conflict has already begun. Heated arguments, abuses, verbal disagreements are all warning alarms which indicate that the fight is already on.

Differentiation Phase - It is the phase when the individuals voice out their differences against each other. The reasons for the conflict are raised in the differentiation phase.

Resolution Phase - A Conflict leads to nowhere. Individuals must try to compromise to some extent and resolve the conflict soon. The resolution phase explores the various options to resolve the conflict.

CONFLICT AT WORKPLACE

Conflict can occur at any place be it organizations, groups and even at our homes.

Let us first go through the below example.

Sandy was heading the operations department of a leading firm. Peter was reporting to Sandy and somehow both never approved each other's ideas and thought processes. Peter was assigned a project which was to be submitted by end of the day. Sandy and Peter disagreed at each and every point and there were severe clashes between them. They could never come to a conclusion and as a result the project could never be completed within the stipulated time.

What was the outcome of their conflict ?

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Conflict Management involves the steps undertaken to prevent the conflict at the right time and also helps to resolve it in an effective and smooth manner.

Conflict management helps individuals to understand the causes of a conflict and helps prevent it at the right time.

No conflict can just start on its own. There has to be an event or an incident to trigger the same. Through conflict management, one actually finds out the possible events which can start a conflict and tries his level best to avoid them.


CASE OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Let us understand conflict management with the help of an example.

Jenny and Joe were a part of the branding team headed by Thomas. Jenny and Joe never got along very well, a fact well known by Thomas. From the very beginning, Thomas had carefully charted out the key responsibility areas for both Jenny and Joe. He had strictly instructed both of them not to interfere in each other's work and communicate through email marking a carbon copy to him as well.

What is Thomas actually trying to do here ?

He is simply trying to avoid a conflict between Jenny and Joe so that they can deliver their best and do not waste their time and energy in fighting.



It is very essential to understand the factors which might lead to a conflict. An individual must consider all the events which initiate a fight for an effective conflict management. Discussion goes a long way in preventing conflicts. Before implementing any new idea, make sure you discuss with each and everyone related to it. Listen to what other individuals have to say and consider their opinions as well. Ignoring anybody's views might lead to a tussle.

No two individuals can think on the same line but it is always wise to find a middle way which takes into account everybody's interests. Don't leave any issue unaddressed, instead discuss it when all the participants are present. Never criticize or make fun of anyone as they lead to a conflict. Be a good and an effective listener. Greet everyone with a warm smile. Individuals must not be too rigid and must learn to compromise sometimes. Do not create an environment which would lead to disagreements.

At workplaces, transparency must be maintained at all levels and there must be a single point of contact to address the issues of individuals. The subordinates should have an easy access to their superiors to avoid confusions. An individual must not utter any word which might hurt the sentiments of the other individuals. If you come across any situation which you don't find appropriate, don't start spreading rumors; instead sit with the other people involved and sort out the differences as soon as possible. **Avoid back bitings as it is one of the strongest reasons for conflicts.**

Always ask yourself whether the fight will benefit you or not? What will you achieve out of fighting? Never provoke others to fight as it would only create a negative environment and add on to one's tensions. Don't always support your friend and oppose the person not known to you. Stand by what is right and always correct the other person if he/she is wrong, but in a polite manner. **Even if a conflict doesn't involve you, don't just ignore, instead intervene immediately to pacify the individuals.** Be a good mediator and try to resolve the issues keeping everyone in mind.

Conflict Management at Workplace

Conflict Management prevents the eruptions of fights and also allows the employees to be serious about their work.

Conflicts must be avoided at workplaces for a healthy and a competitive environment.

Employees must ensure that precautionary measures are taken in advance to prevent conflicts at the workplace.

Employees are the assets of any organization and they must feel motivated and elated to perform well.

Conflicts only lead to tensions and depressions and nothing productive comes out of it.

No individual can work alone; he has to depend on his fellow workers for the maximum output. Every individual has to work in a team and can't afford to fight with his team members.

Conflict Management reduces tensions and employees feel motivated to give their level best to the organizations.

Conflict Management plays a very important role at workplaces as it prevents unnecessary fights and makes offices a better place to work.

CASE OF CONFLICT AT WORKPLACE

Misha and Jia were a part of the operations team with a reputed firm. Both of them had excellent academic records, were hardworking and were never short of ideas. Unfortunately Misha and Jia never liked each other's ideas and never got along very well. Their team could never achieve anything great and always failed to live up to the expectations of their superiors.

Findings: The conflict between Misha and Jia was the major reason why their team could never perform well. The success of any team is directly proportional to the relation among the team members.

TIPS TO MANAGE CONFLICT IN GROUPS

One should not impose his ideas on individuals in a group.

The communication has to be precise, relevant and should not confuse the others.

Remember one wrong misinterpretation, and the entire message gets distorted.

Each member of the group must trust the other member and should have confidence in each other.

While taking decisions, no one should be biased and try to see his personal interest first.

Do not ever underestimate your group member and always listen to his side of the story as well.

Attitude plays a very important role in conflict management. **Nothing can be achieved unless and until you believe in your team and have a positive attitude.**

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Conflicts are going to arise in any group of intelligent people who care about their task. Yet many of us feel so uncomfortable with conflict that we pretend it doesn't exist. Conflict does not mean the team has failed.

In fact, conflicts are often the result of working through different perspectives to create opportunities. Although conflicts can be healthy for a project, they must be resolved to maintain effective teamwork.

Unacknowledged or unresolved conflicts rarely go away: they fester, making the next interchange more difficult.

TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF CONFLICTS IN A TEAM,

Make responsibilities and ground rules clear at the beginning.

Discuss problems as they arise, rather than letting them fester till people explode.

Realize that team members are not responsible for each others' happiness.

Meeting expert John Tropicman recommends the “two-meeting rule” for controversial matters.

1. The first meeting is a chance for everyone to air a point of view about the issue.
2. The second meeting is the one at which the team reaches a decision. The time between the two meetings becomes a cooling-off period

STEPS IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Make Sure the People Involved Really Disagree

Check that Everyone's Information Is Correct

Discover the Needs Each Person Is Trying to Meet.

Search for Alternatives

Repair Negative Feelings

CRITICISM RESPONSES

Conflict is particularly difficult to resolve when someone else criticizes or attacks us directly.

When we are criticized, our natural reaction is to defend ourselves—perhaps by counterattacking

The conflict escalates; feelings are hurt; issues become muddled and more difficult to resolve.

Just as resolving conflict depends on identifying the needs each person is trying to meet, so dealing with criticism depends on understanding the real concern of the critic.

Constructive ways to respond to criticism and get closer to the real concern include :

1. Paraphrasing
2. checking for feelings
3. checking inferences
4. buying time with limited agreement.



Paraphrasing To paraphrase, repeat in your own words the verbal content of the critic's message.

The purposes of paraphrasing are

- (1) to be sure that you have heard the critic accurately.
- (2) to let the critic know what his or her statement means to you.
- (3) to communicate that you are taking the critic and his or her feelings seriously.

Example:-

Criticism: You guys are stonewalling my requests for information.

Paraphrase: You think that we don't give you the information you need.



Checking for Feelings :-When you check the critic's feelings, you identify the emotions that the critic seems to be expressing verbally or nonverbally.

The purposes of checking feelings are to try to understand

(1) the critic's emotions


(2) the importance of the criticism for the critic.

(3) the unspoken ideas and feelings that may actually be more important than the voiced criticism.

Example:

Criticism: You guys are stonewalling my requests for information.

Feelings check: You sound pretty angry, yes?



Checking for Inferences:- When you check the inferences you draw from criticism, you identify the implied meaning of the verbal and nonverbal content of the criticism, taking the statement a step further than the words of the critic to try to understand why the critic is bothered by the action or attitude under discussion.

The purposes of checking inferences are:

- (1) to identify the real (as opposed to the presenting) problem
- (2) to communicate the feeling that you care about resolving the conflict.

Example:

Criticism: You guys are stonewalling my requests for information.

Inference: Are you saying that you need more information from our team?

Buying Time with Limited Agreement:- Buying time is a useful strategy for dealing with criticisms that really sting.

When you buy time with limited agreement, you avoid escalating the conflict (as an angry statement might do) but also avoid yielding to the critic's point of view.

To buy time, restate the part of the criticism you agree to be true. (This is often a fact, rather than the interpretation or evaluation the critic has made of that fact.) Then let the critic respond, before you say anything else.

The purposes of buying time are

(1) to allow you time to think when a criticism really hits home and threatens you, so that you can respond to the criticism rather than simply reacting defensively.

(2) to suggest to the critic that you are trying to hear what he or she is saying.

Example:

Criticism: You guys are stonewalling my requests for information.

Limited agreement: It's true that the cost projections you asked for last week still aren't ready.

YOU-ATTITUDE IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

You-attitude means looking at things from the audience's point of view, respecting the audience, and protecting the audience's ego.

Resolving conflicts or persuading others involves three kinds of awareness:

1. Situational awareness (showing that you understand the situation)
2. Personal awareness (showing that you understand the other person), and
3. Solution awareness (showing that you understand or are seeking a path to resolution).