

CONFFLICT

INTRODUCTION

To study the dynamics of organizational behaviour, study of conflict management deserves attention. In present corporate environment conflict has become very common phenomenon. Conflict is bad as it has adverse effects on the individual performance. If conflict is beyond control it takes a destructive dimension. When employees do not cope up with the conflict situation, there is an increased absenteeism and exit of employees. It can be so disastrous that can lead to demise of an organization. American Firm Shea and Gould perished due to high degree of conflict. On the other hand it has been opinioned that conflict is good for the organization as it produces new ideas, increases competitive spirit, cohesiveness in the team and instills an atmosphere of brotherhood in the organization. This is only possible if ideas are properly channelized and there is proper delegation of authority, empowerment and autonomy in functioning.

Definitions

Conflict can be defined (Thomas K.A.) as the “**process that begins when one party perceives that another party has negatively affected something that the first party cares about.**” Conflict must be perceived by either of the parties. Stiff opposition due to incompatibility of organizational goals characterizes it. Conflict can also be caused due to difference about interpretation of facts or issues involved. Conflict takes an ugly turn and take a form of violence due to disagreement based on behavioral expectations. It could be covert or overt and can be seen when one observes violent acts of individual in organizations.

Nature and scope of conflict

Every organization has its objective. It is further broken down as departmental objectives, group goals and lastly individual goals. When individual interacts with another individual there is perceptual and communication problems that causes misunderstanding and leads to individual conflict situation. It is also true of groups. Group conflicts indicate the way of inter-group behaviour in an organization. Inter-group conflict occurs due to group competition and group cohesiveness. This leads to a feeling of ‘we’ and ‘they’. “We are always right and they are always wrong”. Hence a beginning of conflict. Aims and objectives of various organizations differ drastically that give rise to greater competition hence a high level of conflict. Conflict can arise between employer and employees, management and workers, one department and another, stakeholders, shareholders, producer and customers and between various trade unions that are often politically motivated. Schein has pointed out that, this problem exists because as groups become more committed to their goals and norms, they are likely to become competitive with one another and seek to undermine their rivals’ activities, thereby becoming a liability to the organization as a whole. The overall problem, then, is how to establish high productive, collaborative intergroup relations. Michael states that conflict can lead to breakdown in standard mechanism of decision making so that an individual or group experiences difficulty in selecting an action alternative. The breakdown may be because of competing demands on an individual or group rivalry and competition. There can be vertical and horizontal conflicts; or individual conflict, group conflict and organizational conflict.

Conflict can be considered as expression of hostility, negative attitude, aggression and gross misunderstanding. It is caused due to varying interest of individual or groups. The term ‘conflict’ is used in four ways to indicate

1. Antecedent conditions of conflictual behaviour, such as scarcity of resources.
2. Affective states of individuals involved such as stress, tension, hostility, anxiety etc.
3. Cognitive state of individuals, that is their perception or awareness of conflictual situations.
4. Conflictual behaviour, ranging from passive resistance to overt aggression.

Functional and Dysfunctional Conflict

Conflict that supports the individual and group goals, which leads to higher performance is called **functional conflict** while the conflicts that hinders individual or group performance is called **dysfunctional conflict**. The latter generally takes destructive form. There is thin margin between the two types of conflicts mentioned above. While evaluating the impact of conflict on goal achievement, individual perception and effect of group performance should be evaluated. If the conflict contributes towards higher performance then the conflict should be called functional or otherwise dysfunctional. Conflict can be broadly classified in three types i.e. **task oriented conflict, behavioural conflict and structural conflict or process conflict**. Task conflict relates to the group goals or objectives to be achieved by the group while behavioral conflict relates to individual's value system, approach, attitude, ego state, skill and norms being followed by him. Studies reveal that most of the dysfunctional conflict fall under this category. Process conflict is related to how a task is being accomplished in the organization. It is related with various processes, procedures, drills and instructions that are being followed on a particular job. When individual differs in this regard, conflict arises. This type of conflict can be eliminated to a large extent by following strict discipline in the work procedure and adhering to the rules and regulations.:

Functional Conflict

1. Conflict develops cohesiveness within the group members. A group goal therefore becomes a priority. Individual goals are then relegated to secondary position.
2. Conflict leads to innovation and creativity, as there is competing spirit among various groups.
3. Conflict provides challenging work environment and enhances opportunities for self-development of group that leads to formation of group norms.
4. Enhance work culture leads to upgradation of various systems within the organization and therefore growth is achieved.

Dysfunctional Conflict

Conflict may turn out to be detrimental and disastrous and having deleterious effects.

Dysfunctional nature of conflict can be identified in the following circumstances:

1. When conflict does not lead to solution.
2. When basic goals of the organization are neglected.
3. People should be treated with due respect. If it is violated and a climate of distrust and suspicion is created people feel defeated and demeaned which develops antagonism and leads to conflict.
4. Conflict may lead to absenteeism and subsequently to increased turn over if not controlled in time.
5. Dual management style may create hatred and lead to dysfunctional conflict.
6. Disagreement with management may be considered as disloyalty, if this environment prevails, an opportunity for creativity would be lost and employees would lose interest in their job. This would lead to increased conflicting situations.

TRANSITION OF CONFLICT

Traditional view

During 1930-40s, conflict was considered to be bad and viewed negatively. It was considered harmful, unnecessary and considered synonymous to violence, destruction and irrational. The view held that the conflict arose due to poor communication, lack of openness, lack of trust and failure of managers to be responsive to the needs and aspirations of their employees. The view further held that the conflict must be avoided at all costs. During the same period, the scientific management and administrative school of management that were in the state of evolution, developed such organizational structure where responsibilities had been properly laid down, rules, regulations and policies had been inbuilt in the system. Thus a proper mechanism was introduced in the management systems and an adequate attention was paid by the managerial staff to ensure that there was no misunderstanding among the employees and that the conflict was avoided.

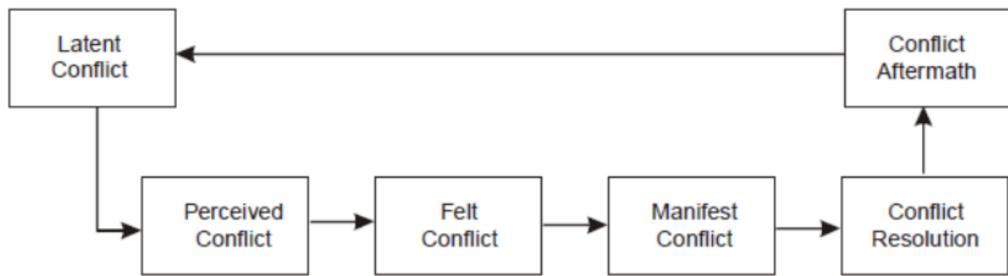
Modern View

The modern view holds that conflict may be necessary for organizational effectiveness. It is believed that harmonious, peaceful and cooperative groups can become static. Minimum level of conflict that keeps the group alive, self critical and creative is desirable. Modernists believe that conflict is structural in nature, is inevitable and endemic to the organizational milieu. It is a product of systems and determined by structural factors and integral to the nature of change. When groups interact there is bound to be difference of opinion and disagreements, which is a cause for conflict. It exists even when there is single individual who is faced with organizational problems like decision making. Conflict should be welcomed and managed effectively. Some of the positive points of minimum level of conflict are as under:

- (a) Conflict should be expressed. By doing so, communication between two groups is restored that promotes growth.
- (b) Minimum level of conflict serves as pre-requisite for organizational development. Conflict brings changes.
- (c) Conflict helps achieve cohesion within the group that develops group identity and members of the group follow group norms setting aside personal problems. This tendency leads higher level of productivity, sense of identity with the organization and increases group ability to compete with groups and departments.
- (d) Poor decisions are detrimental to organizational growth. Minimum level of conflict promotes stimulus for analytical thinking, which may challenge views, policies and systems prevailing in the organization. It will lead to reviews hence new policies may be introduced in the organization.
- (e) Conflict can serve as power equalizer between two parties. This is clearly observed during management union meetings. While management is powerful at the beginning of the discussion it however tends to equalize itself as the discussion proceeds.

CONFLICT PROCESS

The various stages of Conflict process are **latent conflict, perceived conflict, felt conflict manifest conflict, conflict resolution and conflict aftermath**. The process is adopted and explained below.



Latent Conflict

It is a first stage of conflict when conflict-promoting situations appear on the scene between individuals and groups. In this stage potential conflict inducing forces exist. For example demand for various resources by departments when some may get and be satisfied and others may not get and be dissatisfied. Hence there may exist a situation between two groups. At this stage the seeds of dissatisfaction has been sown.

FACTORS OF CONFLICT

Structural Factors

- Specialization
- Interdependence
- Common resources
- Goal differences
- Authority relationships
- Status inconsistencies
- Jurisdictional ambiguities

Personal Factors

- Skills and abilities
- Personalities
- Perceptions
- Values and ethics
- Emotions
- Communication barriers
- Cultural differences

Perceived Conflict

When one party frustrate the design of the other party, people perceive that a conflunctual conditions exist. For example sales manager may need additional budget for promotional activities which financial manager may not release. The sales manager may attribute lack of finance as potential cause for fall in sales. Thus a conflict between the two may brew. At this stage the conflict does not surface.

Felt Conflict

At this stage, the conflict is actually felt and cognized. As stated earlier, the funds are not released by the finance manager and the problem is being surfaced and there is a likelihood of confrontation.

Manifest Conflict

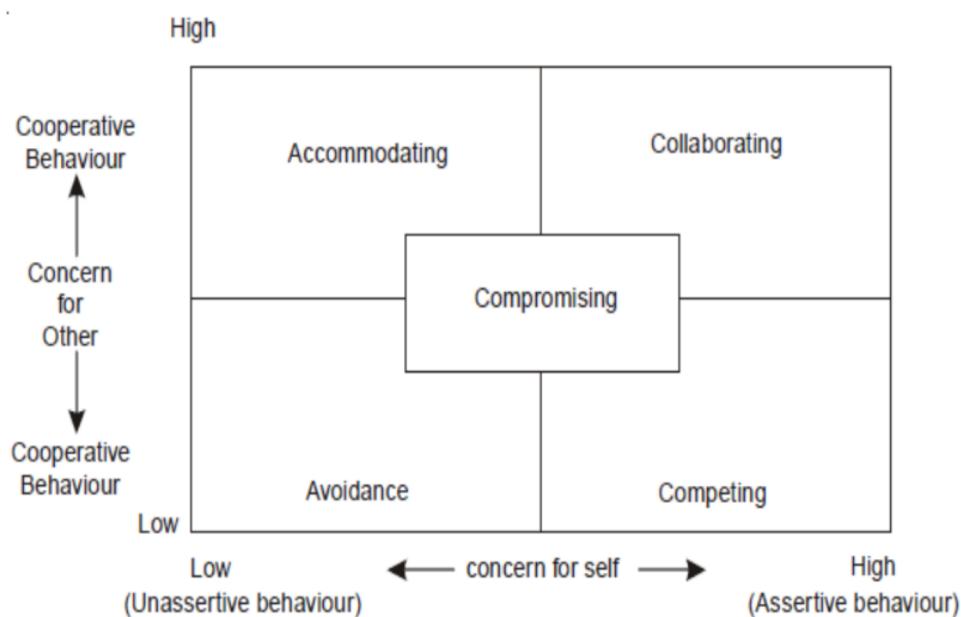
In this stage, there is not only recognition or acknowledgement of conflict but also manifestation of conflict by covert or overt behaviour. It is a stage of open dispute. Both parties devise their strategies to face each other. In the above example sales manager may make his point for additional funds for promotional activities especially during festival season. Finance manager may openly turn down the request since he might have allotted additional funds for procurement of better raw material for production department. Sales manager may argue that better raw material has no meaning unless the facts are brought to the notice of customers, which can only be done through promotional campaign. The debate may be unending and frustrating.

Conflict Aftermath

Once the conflict is resolved between the two parties, there is always a party, which is looser because the resolution is the outcome of win – lose or the compromise strategy, a stage is set for subsequent conflict episodes. A party, which feels defeated, may start preparations and be on the look out for the assault to take the revenge. Conflict resolution has been added as an additional box in the figure to elucidate that conflict aftermath is a direct function of the results of the conflict resolution style adopted and exercised in any given situation.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION MODEL

Conflict between parties can be resolved by five different modes. Parties involved may adopt any of the following solutions, which are explained in Figure below.



Avoidance:

This strategy involves a general disregard for the causes of the conflict and the person might diplomatically sidestep a conflicting issue, postpone addressing it till later, or withdraw physically or psychologically from a threatening situation. Avoiding mode is used when the individual is both unassertive and uncooperative – that is, the person has a very low concern for his own and his opponent's needs. The individual follows the following three methods

- i) Non-attention: The manager totally avoids or ignores the dysfunctional situation. Individuals tend to “look the other way” or disregard hostile action in hopes that the situation will resolve itself in time
- ii) Physical separation: It involves moving conflicting groups physically apart from each other. The rationale is that if the groups cannot interact, conflict will diminish.
- iii) Limited interaction: Groups are allowed to interact only on formal situations.

Avoidance style can be very beneficial under the following conditions:

- When the issue involved in the conflict is trivial,
- When more pressing issues are to be handled by the individual with a limited time frame.
- When one's power is very low and there is no chance of satisfying one's concern
- When more information is needed to make a good decision
- When someone else can resolve the conflict more effectively
- When you require time to regain more strength and look into different perspective

Accommodation:

Accommodation is a negotiation style where one party is willing to oblige or adapt to meet the needs of the other party. That party that accommodates loses and the other party wins. Accommodation is useful for negotiation on minor matters. The negotiation parties may not look for creative, new solutions. Accommodation might take the form of selfless generosity, or obeying another's order rather unwillingly or giving in to another person's point of view. In all these cases, the individual neglects his or her own concern to satisfy the concerns of their other party. There is an element of self-sacrifice.

Accommodating is useful in the following situations:

- Where the individual realizes that he or she is wrong
- By yielding, the person indicates to the other conflicting person that he is reasonable
- When an issue is much more important to the other person than to the individual
- By being accommodating, the person maintains good will and a cooperative relationship and also build social credits so that the other person gives in when a later issue becomes important to this individual.
- When preserving harmony and avoiding disruption are especially more important
- When continued competition would only damage one's cause because one is outmatched and is losing.

Competition:

Competition occurs when one party negotiates to maximize its results at the expense of the other party's needs. Competition leads to one party gaining the advantage over the other. One party wins while the other party loses. Although it is quick and can be used as counter against another person, this option usually produces a win-lose result.

Competing is a power oriented mode of resolving tensions and one uses whatever power one has or can muster such skills, knowledge, abilities, rank being well-connected etc to win.

Competing is useful in the following situations:

- When the resources are limited and the system has to be pruned
- When quick and decisive action has to be taken during emergencies
- When one has to take unpopular decision such as enforcing discipline, unpopular rules, cost cutting measures
- When issues are vital to the survival of the company where one is aware of the right solutions.

Thus, while competing mode is useful in certain situations, people have to be careful not to surround themselves with yes-men and not to foster ignorance and duplicity in the system. People low on this mode can learn to use their power more and enhance their own as well as their organization's effectiveness.

Compromising:

Compromise is the settlement of differences through concessions of one or both parties. In compromising, the party tries to find some expedient, mutually acceptable solutions which partially satisfies both parties, though neither is fully satisfied. A compromising stance addresses the issue without avoiding it, but does not explore the alternative in a way that would be completely satisfying to both parties as in the case of collaboration.

Compromising involves "splitting the difference", exchanging concessions and seeking quick middle-ground solutions.

Compromising is a useful mode in the following situations:

- When the goals pursued are important, but not so important that it is worth potential disruptions by taking very assertive or unyielding positions.
- When two parties with equal power are strongly committed to mutually exclusive goals such as in labor-management bargaining situations
- When interim solutions are required till a more thorough and permanent solutions to the problem can be found.
- When solutions have to be arrived at under extreme time pressures
- When both collaboration and competition fail to work effectively in resolving conflicts.

Thus, compromise as a conflict resolution mode might offer an easy way out, but is also likely to produce adverse overall effects for the organization if that is the main or only approach to conflict resolutions taken by managers in the organization.

Collaboration:

Collaboration occurs when people cooperate to produce a solution satisfactory to both. Collaborating involves an attempt to work with the other person to find solutions that would be satisfying to both parties. Here, the underlying concerns of both parties are explored in depth, the disagreements examine in detail and resolutions arrived at by combining the insights of both the parties. A creative solution usually emerges because of the joint efforts of both the parties who are keen on both gaining from the situation without hurting the other.

Collaboration is useful in the following situations:

- When two goals of the two parties are both too important to be compromised
 - When the commitment of both parties is essential for important projects to succeed
 - When the objectives of the parties are
 - i) to learn
 - ii) to merge insights that different people bring to a problem because of their backgrounds, training, discipline or orientations
 - iii) to work through hard feelings which are interfering with a desired interpersonal relationship
- Thus, in collaborating, the intention of the parties is to solve the problem by clarifying differences rather than by accommodating various points of view. Examples include attempting to find win-win solutions that allow both parties' goal to be completely achieved and seeking a conclusion that incorporates the valid insights of both parties.