

Conflict

Conflict can be defined in many ways and can be considered as an expression of hostility, negative attitudes, antagonism, aggression, rivalry and misunderstanding. It is also associated with situations that involve contradictory or irreconcilable interests between two opposing groups.



Concept of Conflict

Conflict is a state of discord caused by the actual or perceived opposition of needs, values and interests. A conflict can be internal (within oneself) or external (between two or more individuals). Conflict explains many aspects of social life such as social disagreement, conflict of interests and fight between individuals, groups or organizations.

In political terms, “conflict” can refer to wars, revolutions or other struggles, which may involve use of force. Without proper social arrangement or resolution, conflict in social settings can result in stress or tension amongst stakeholders.

Conflict arises “when two or more parties, with perceived incompatible goals seek to undermine each other’s goal-seeking capability”.

Conflict arises in the situations of competition and co-operation. In competitive situations, two or more individuals or parties have mutually inconsistent goals and either party tries to reach their goal and undermine the attempts of the other to reach theirs. Therefore, competitive situations will, by their nature, cause conflict.

However, conflict can also occur in cooperative situations, in which two or more individuals or parties have consistent goals, but the manner in which one party tries to reach their goal can still undermine the other individual or party.

A clash of interests, values, actions or directions often results in conflict. Conflict refers to existence of that clash. Psychologically, conflict exists when reduction of one motivating stimulus involves increase in another so that new adjustment is demanded. Even when we say there is a potential conflict, we are implying that there is already a conflict of direction even though a clash may not yet have occurred.

Characteristics of Conflict

- 1. Conflict is a Process:** Conflict occurs in 'layers'. First layer is always misunderstanding. The other layers are differences of values, differences of viewpoint, differences of interest, and interpersonal differences. It is also called a process because it begins with one party perceiving the other to oppose or negatively affect its interests and ends with competing, collaborating, compromising or avoiding.
- 2. Conflict is Inevitable:** Conflict exists everywhere. No two persons are the same. Hence they may have individual differences. And the differences may be because of values or otherwise, lead to conflict. Although inevitable, conflict can be minimized, diverted and/or resolved. Conflict develops because we are dealing with people's lives, jobs, children, pride, self-concept, ego and sense of mission. Conflict is inevitable and often good, for example, good teams always go through a "form, storm, norm and perform" period.
- 3. Conflict is a Normal Part of Life:** Individuals, groups, and organizations have unlimited needs and different values but limited resources. Thus, this incompatibility is bound to lead to conflicts. The conflict is not a problem, but if it is poorly managed then it becomes a problem.
- 4. Perception:** It must be perceived by the parties to it, otherwise it does not exist. In interpersonal interaction, perception is more important than reality. What we perceive and think affects our behavior, attitudes, and communication.
- 5. Opposition:** One party to the conflict must be perceiving or doing something the other party does not like or want.
- 6. Interdependence and Interaction:** There must be some kind of real or perceived interdependence. Without interdependence there can be no interaction. Conflict occurs only when some kind of interaction takes place.
- 7. Everyone is inflicted with Conflict:** Conflict may occur within an individual, between two or more individuals, groups or between organizations.
- 8. Conflict is not One-dimensional:** It comes into different ways in accordance with degree of seriousness and capacity. At times, it may improve even a difficult situation.

Sources of Conflicts

1. Competition for Scarce Resources
2. Time Pressure
3. Unreasonable Standards, Policies, Rules or Procedures
4. Communications Breakdowns
5. Personality Clashes
6. Ambiguous or Overlapping Jurisdictions
7. Unrealized Expectations
8. Competition for Resources
9. Task Interdependence
10. Status Problems
11. Individual Traits
12. Inter-Relation or Dependence of Departments
13. Ambiguous Objectives and Goals
14. Individual Differences
15. Absence of Time Management
16. Lack of Accurate Forecasting of Eventualities
17. Employees Dissatisfaction
18. Poorly Defined Responsibilities, Authority and Role
19. Undesirable Demands of Trade Union / Workers
20. Poorly Defined System of Payment
21. Lack of Discipline and Rules and Regulation
22. Faulty Performance Appraisal and Reward System
23. Poor, Imbalanced Authority / Power Distribution
24. Privacy Policy
25. Quality of Work Life – QWL
26. Conformity Issue
27. Job Enrichment
28. Undue Control

Types of Conflicts

When we think of the different types of conflict, we might instantly think of the ones referred to in literature, especially in fiction. They can be applied to real life, of course. However, in contemporary times, types of conflict which are easily identifiable are classified into four different types:

1. Intrapersonal Conflict

Intrapersonal conflict takes place within an individual. The person experiences it in his own mind. Thus, it is a type of conflict that is psychological involving the individual's thoughts, values, principles and emotions. Intrapersonal conflict may come in different forms, from the simple mundane ones like deciding whether or not to go vegan for lunch to ones that can affect major decisions such as choosing a career path.

However, this type of conflict can be quite difficult to handle, if you find it hard to decipher your inner struggles. It results in restlessness and uneasiness, or can even cause depression. On such occasions, it is advised to seek a way to let go of the anxiety by communicating with other people. Eventually, when the person finds himself/herself out of the situation, he/she can become more empowered as a person. Thus, the experience invokes a positive change which helps in personal growth.

2. Intragroup Conflict

Intragroup conflict occurs among individuals within a team. The incompatibilities and misunderstandings between team members leads to intragroup conflict. It starts from interpersonal disagreements like team members have different personalities which may lead to tension or differences in views and ideas. Say for example, during a presentation, members of the team might find the notions presented by the one presiding to be erroneous due to their differences in opinion.

Within a team, conflict can be helpful in coming up with decisions, which will eventually allow them to achieve their objectives as a team. But, if the degree of conflict disrupts harmony among the members, then some serious guidance from a different party will be needed for it to be settled.

3. Interpersonal Conflict

Interpersonal conflict means a conflict between two individuals. Basically, this occurs because of some differences in people. We have varied personalities which usually lead to incompatible choices and opinions. So, it is a natural occurrence which can eventually help in personal growth or developing our relationships with others.

In addition, adjustments are necessary for managing this type of conflict. However, when interpersonal conflict becomes too destructive, calling in a mediator helps so as to have the issue resolved.

4. Intergroup Conflict

Intergroup conflict occurs when a misunderstanding arises among different teams within an organization. For example, the marketing department of an organization can come in conflict with the customer support department. This is because of the varied sets of goals and interests of these different groups. In addition to this, competition also contributes to intergroup conflict. There are other factors which increase this type of conflict. Some of these factors may include a rivalry in resources or the boundaries set by a group to others which forms their own identity as a team.

Conflict should not always be perceived as a problem rather at times it is a chance for growth and can be an effective means of opening up among groups or individuals. However, when conflict begins to suppress or disrupt productivity and gives way to more conflicts, then conflict management is what is needed for problem resolution.