
UNIT 4 COOPERATION, COMPETITION AND CONFLICTS

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4.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit focuses on three important aspects of management of individuals in a society. Every individual interacts with other individuals in order to survive. In the beginning the interaction is with parent or caretaker, later on with other individuals in the society. As interaction takes place there are cooperation, competition and conflicts emerging in these relationships. The present unit deals with all these three aspects and points out their importance and functions and how individuals work through their conflict, competition and cooperation, so as to achieve their stipulated goals.

4.1 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- 1 explain social interaction and process;
- 1 define and explain cooperation;
- 1 explain about competition;
- 1 identify conflict situation;
- 1 differentiate between conflict and competition; and
- 1 describe accommodation.

4.2 SOCIAL INTERACTION AND SOCIAL PROCESS

Each and every person is a social and cultural being. It is very difficult for people to live in isolation. Human beings always live in various groups and associations. They act and behave in a certain manner. In each and every moment, the behaviour of each individual is affected by the behaviour of others. This interaction is the essence of social life. Green defines social interaction as “the mutual influences that affects groups. Also these groups affect one another in their attempts to solve problems and in their striving towards goals”. According to Dawson and Gettys, “Social interaction is a process whereby men interpenetrate the minds of each other.” Gish defined social interaction as, “it is the reciprocal influence in which human beings exert on each other through inter stimulation and response.” Thus we can say that social interaction refers to the entire range of social relationships, wherein there is reciprocal stimulation and response between individuals.

Social interaction produces some definite influence upon social relations that exists among human beings. Two essential conditions of social interaction are:

- i) social contact
- ii) communication

4.2.1 Social Contact

Social contact can be established through the medium of radio, letters, telephones and other media of communication. Social contact is the first and important phase of interaction. It may be positive or negative. If it is positive, they lead to cooperation, mutual understanding and assimilation. If it is negative, they create hatred, jealousy and conflict. The above forms of social interaction are termed as social processes. MacIver observes, “social process is the manner in which the relations of the members of a group, are brought together to acquire a certain distinctive character. According to Gillin and Gillin, “by social processes we mean those ways of interacting by which we can establish system of relationships or find out what happens when changes of relationships occur or what happens when changes disturb already existing modes of life.” In this context we can use three important terms, viz., cooperation, competition and conflict.

Social interaction requires essential communication. Besides this, communications are essential adjuncts of social contact. Language, gestures, symbols, radio, telephone, television, newspaper etc. are the media for communication. Human interaction is undoubtedly a communicative interaction. In this context, we can further say that social interaction usually takes place in the form of co-operation, competition, conflict, accommodation and assimilation.

Cooperation means working together in the pursuit of a common interest. It is a joint activity. It is the conscious form of social interaction where two or more persons work together to gain a common end. Cooperation may be of different types. Cooperation for human beings is both a psychological and social necessity. On the other hand, competition is an unconscious, impersonal and continuous struggle between individuals and groups for satisfaction. It is a contest to obtain something which does not exist in a quantity sufficient to meet the demand.

Competition, like co-operation, is indispensable in social life. Competition performs many useful functions in society. At different levels, competition occurs. It may be economic, cultural, social, and political. There is no society which is exclusively competitive or exclusively cooperative. Besides competition and cooperation, conflict is another important process in human relations.

Conflict is a conscious action as well as personal activity. It lacks continuity but it is a universal phenomena. Causes of conflict are mainly individual differences, cultural differences, clash of interest, social change etc. Besides this, conflict serves constructive and positive ends. Conflict has both integrative and disintegrative effects.

Interaction is a two-way process whereby each individual or group stimulates the other and in varying degrees modifies the behaviour of the participants. The behaviour and personality characteristics of individual members of a group affect the behaviour of others and make a significant impact over the functioning of a group as a whole. The behaviour of each individual is affected by the behaviour of other individual. This is known as interaction process and it is the essence of social life. According to Eldredge and Merrill, "social interaction is the general process whereby two or more persons are in meaningful contact as a result of which their behaviour is modified, however slightly." Social interaction refers to the entire range of social relationship, wherein there is reciprocal stimulation and response between individuals. Social interaction is of a dual nature, of persons with persons and of groups with groups. The main forms of social interaction are cooperation, competition, conflict, accommodation and assimilation. Combinations of these are called social processes. Social interaction and social process are:

- 1) sequence of events
- 2) repetition of events
- 3) relationship between events
- 4) continuity of events
- 5) special results.

Actually society is an arena where there is expression of different social processes. Social processes are fundamental to the life of a community. Society exists wherever several individuals are in reciprocal relationships. It constitutes an aggregation of individuals in a society. So we can say that there are two forms of social interaction i.e.

- i) conjunctive
- ii) disjunctive.

Social contact initiates interaction. Social process is a variety of view-points. Social behaviour can be classified on the basis of - (a) their intrinsic nature, (b) the inherent drives, instincts, interests, desires etc. and (c) the observable behaviours upon which observers can agree. We are concerned with the fundamental types, i.e., cooperating, competition, conflict, accommodation and assimilation. Actually interaction occurs in the form of the above mentioned processes.

Self Assessment Questions

- 1) According to Dawan and Gettys social interaction is a
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- 2) The two essential conditions of social interaction are:
i) and ii).....
- 3) Cooperation means
- 4) What are the main forms of social interaction?
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4.3 COOPERATION

Cooperation is an integrating activity and is believed to be the opposite of competition. The word “cooperation” is derived from the two Latin words “co” meaning together and “operari” meaning to work. It is thus a joint activity in pursuit of common goals or shared rewards. It is goal oriented and conscious form of social interaction. Actually it involves two elements – (i) common end and (ii) organised effort. It is the process by which individuals or groups combine their effort, in a more or less organised way for the attainment of common objective. Generally co-operation means working together for a common objective. In many festivals, volunteers work together to collect money from different parts and want to organise the program successfully and everybody want to stretch forward their hands to celebrate the occasion successfully. Among the members of the group, there seems to be indication of good interaction process. All of them behave in co-operative manner. Co-operation is brought about by several factors which includes the following:

- 1 desire for individual benefits
- 1 desire to give and share
- 1 total decision on common purposes
- 1 situational necessity and
- 1 desire to achieve larger goals.

4.3.1 Types of Cooperation

We can classify cooperation into five categories, viz.

- i) Direct cooperation
 - ii) Indirect cooperation
 - iii) Primary cooperation
 - iv) Secondary cooperation and
 - v) Tertiary cooperation
- i) **Direct cooperation:** The essential characteristics of this kind of cooperation are that people do in company the thing which can also do separately. In this category cooperating individuals do things of common interest together and perform identical functions. Playing together, worshipping together are the examples of direct co-operation.
 - ii) **Indirect cooperation:** In this type of cooperation individual work towards a common end each has his own specialised functions. Thus, we can say that indirect cooperation is obtained when people perform dissimilar tasks towards a common end, i.e., each has its specialised role to play. In the modern society it is the indirect cooperation which is more in play than the direct cooperation because technological changes require specialisation of skills and functions.
 - iii) **Primary cooperation:** There is an identity of interest between the individual and the group. It is the cooperation which is found in primary groups such as family. Not only family but also peer groups is also called primary cooperation where people have to choose face-to-face relations. We can also say that interest of the individual merge with the interest of the primary group.
 - iv) **Secondary cooperation:** This type of cooperation is generally found in the secondary group, viz., government, industry, church and trade union etc.
 - v) **Tertiary cooperation:** This is the interaction between various big and small group to meet a particular situation. Here the individual or group who wants to compete with one another, come together and cooperate with each other for a specific purpose. In such type of cooperation the attitudes of the cooperating parties are purely opportunistic.

4.3.2 Role of Cooperation

It is a universal phenomenon. Cooperation for human beings is both a psychological and social necessity. Individual as well as collective goals can not be achieved without cooperation. Cooperation is essential for maintenance of social order. We

can not do anything without cooperation, if we are to live as members of the society. Family members cooperate with each other in terms of sharing economic, emotional and social requirements of one another. All the activity in each and every family is done in a cooperative way. People learn their first lesson in cooperation as members of the family. The physical, mental and even the spiritual needs of the individual remain unsatisfied if he does not agree to cooperate with his fellow members.

Self Assessment Questions

1) What are the types of cooperation? Give name only.

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2) Define direct and indirect cooperation.

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3) Explain tertiary cooperation in your own words.

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4) What is the role of cooperation?

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4.4 COMPETITION

Competition is the most important form of social struggle. According to Anderson and Parker, "Competition is that form of social action in which we strive against each other for the possession of or use of some limited material and non-material goods." According to Sutherland, Woodward and Maxwell, "Competition is an impersonal, unconscious continuous struggle which, because of their limited supply, all may not have." Competition is a form of interaction. It is the struggle for position to gain economic status. It occurs whenever there is an insufficient supply of anything that human being desire - insufficient in the sense that all cannot have as much of it as they wish. Sometimes competition happens because of limited supply and also difficult for equal distribution.

4.4.1 Characteristics of Competition

The characteristics of competition are:

- 1 Competition is impersonal struggle. Park and Burgess defined competition as “interaction without social contact.” We can say it is inter-individual struggle that is impersonal. It is usually not directed against any individual or group in particular.
- 1 Competition is universal. There is no society which is devoid of competition. Not only this, degree of competition may vary from society to society. It is very common for society as well as culture.
- 1 Competition is considered as conducive to progress. Competition provides the individuals better opportunities to satisfy their desires for new experiences and recognitions.
- 1 Both associative and non-associative dimensions of social processes indicate competition.
- 1 Competition is mainly an unconscious activity but personal competition or rivalry is a conscious activity.
- 1 Competition may create emotional disturbances.
- 1 Competition is an innate tendency.
- 1 Competition is a social phenomenon.
- 1 Degree of competition is determined by social values and social structure.

4.4.2 Value of Competition

Competition is indispensable in social life. Competition performs many powerful functions in society. Sometimes competition is extremely dynamic. It performs five positive functions.

- 1 It helps to determine the status and location of individual members in a system of hierarchy.
- 1 It tends to stimulate economy, efficiency and inventiveness.
- 1 It tends to enhance one's ego.
- 1 It prevents undue concentration of power in an individual or group of individuals.
- 1 It creates respect for the rules of the same group.

We can say that competition determines who is to perform what function. According to Ross, “Competition performs that broad function of assigning to each individual in his social world. Competition is a progressive force which fulfils and does not necessarily destroy.” We can further say that fair competition is conducive to economic as well as social progress. Competition provides the individuals better opportunities to satisfy their desires for new experiences and recognition. It believes in achieved status. Sometimes competition has some negative function. It may lead to frustration. It may lead to monopoly. It may lead to conflict. It may create emotional disturbances. It may develop unfriendly and unfavourable attitudes among the persons or groups toward one another. It is true that unfair competition has the most disintegrating effects. Sometimes unlimited competition leads to monopoly.

Competition and cooperation differ in many respects. No society is exclusively competitive or exclusively cooperative. Actually, social system is a balance between competitive and cooperative force. But some competition is healthy and fair.

Self Assessment Questions

1) Explain competition in our own words.

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2) Write three characteristics of competition.

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3.) Explain the value of competition in the society.

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4.5 CONFLICT

Conflict is a conscious action. It is a deliberate intent to oppose. We can say that conflict is universal. Not only this, conflict lacks continuity. Besides this, it is a personal activity. According to Gillin and Gillin, “Conflict is the social process in which individuals or groups seek their ends up directly challenging the antagonist by violence or threat of violence.” Green defined, “Conflict is the deliberate attempt to oppose, resist and coerce the will of another or others.” Conflict is a competition in its more occasional, personal and hostile forms. It is a process of seeking to obtain rewards by eliminating or weakening the competitors. It is inherent in every society or social system. Conflict is apparently noted when an individual or a group seeks to attain its own end. Conflict is the opposite of cooperation. Conflict may lead to antagonism, violence or threat to peace. Conflict is also regarded as non-associative social process.

4.5.1 Causes of Conflict

According to Freud and some other psychologists, the innate instinct for aggression in man is the main cause of conflicts. Generally it arises from a clash of interest within groups and societies and between groups and societies. The significant causes are:

1 **Individual difference** – It is true that, we, the human being, are not alike by nature, attributes, interests, personalities etc. These differences may lead to conflict among the human being.

1 **Cultural differences** – The culture of a group differs from the culture of the

other group. The cultural differences among the groups sometimes cause tension and lead to conflict.

- 1 **Differences of opinion regarding interest** – In fact, the interests of different people or groups occasionally clash. For example we can say that interests of the employers and employees vary in many respect which may ultimately leads to conflict among them.
- 1 **Social change** – Social changes occur off and on in each and every society. Conflict is an expression of social disequilibrium. Social change is the cultural log which leads to conflict.

4.5.2 Characteristics of Conflict

The characteristics of conflicts are:

- 1 Although conflict is universal but it's nature vary from society to society. No society is characterised exclusively by conflict.
- 1 Conflict is a conscious action. To achieve the respective goals the members oppose one another.
- 1 Conflict leads to social change. It is mainly an expression of disequilibrium.
- 1 It primarily remains personal activity. Sometimes it acquires greater intensity and involves many people. At first, it is manifested at the level of a particular group but ultimately it involves the entire society.
- 1 Asymmetrical social, political and economic relations coupled with the sense of relative deprivation as the root cause of social conflict.
- 1 Sometimes conflict is the life of society and progress emerges from a struggle in which each individual, class or institution seeks to realise its own idea of good.
- 1 We the people are organised into groups to seek a common goal, the probability of conflict increases.
- 1 All conflicts are not the same.
- 1 We face conflicts on all levels as we have disagreements with family, friends and co-workers.
- 1 Conflict is an ever-present process in human relations.
- 1 Unmanaged conflict is a threat to the survival of the group and ultimately tends to make the group less effective.
- 1 Conflict can occur within groups (intra-group conflict) and among groups (inter-group conflict).

4.5.3 Effects of Conflict

Conflict sometimes creates positive and sometimes creates negative impact. The effects of conflict are many and manifold. It is varied as well as unpredictable. We can say that the conflict may have the following effects:

- 1 Increases tension within or between the groups

- 1 Disrupt normal activities
- 1 Weaken group activities
- 1 Harmful to individuals
- 1 Help to restructure the group
- 1 Help to form new groups
- 1 Gives positive result
- 1 Improves decision-making process
- 1 Increase bitterness
- 1 Increase alienation
- 1 Become violent
- 1 Help to gain recognition
- 1 Increase unity and cohesion
- 1 Strengthen group boundaries
- 1 Help to form new group.

Thus, we can say that conflict has both positive and negative effects. It is true that conflict happens in any set-up and it creates impact on group members.

4.5.4 Types of Conflict

Conflict may be of various types, viz,

- 1) **Overt and covert:** Overt conflict has some manifestation but covert conflict or latent conflict primarily remains invisible.
- 2) **Personal and corporate:** Personal conflict occurs within the group due to hostility, jealousy etc., on the other hand, corporate conflict occurs among the groups within a society or between two societies.
- 3) **Temporary and perpetual:** When conflict occurs among the individuals in the bus or in the shop or in the road are called temporary conflict, on the other hand when conflict occurs between two rival groups, then it is called perpetual conflict.

Conflict is not a continuous process. It may stretch for sometime. In each and every conflict there is intermittent period of peace and social harmony.

According to Gillin and Gillin, conflict can be divided into five types, viz.,

- 1 Personal conflict – It is the conflict between two persons within the same group.
- 1 Racial conflict – It is the result of the feeling or racial superiority or inferiority.
- 1 Class conflict – It is the conflict between two classes.
- 1 Political conflict – It is the conflict between parties of political power.
- 1 International conflict – It is the conflict between two nations.

Self Assessment Questions

1) Explain conflict.

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2) What are the causes of conflict?

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3) Write five characteristics of conflict.

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4) Write negative effects of conflicts.

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4.5.5 Distinction between Conflict and Competition

The salient points are:

- 1 Conflict takes place on a conscious level, competition is unconscious.
- 1 Competition is non-violent, but conflict may create violence.
- 1 Conflict involves contact, competition does not.
- 1 Competition is a continuous process, but conflict is an intermittent process.
- 1 Conflict disregards social norms but competition does care social norms.
- 1 Conflict takes place on a conscious level but competition is unconscious.

Besides this, we can say that conflict and competition have a common root because in each case individuals and groups are generally striving towards incompatible goals. Conflict may lead to alliances with other groups, creating bonds between loosely structured groups or bringing together different individuals and groups in a community as they unite to fight a common threat. The structure

of the group and its degree of tolerance of conflict will affect the results of intra-group dissatisfaction. Actually conflict is a fundamental human and social trait. Cooperation is a condition of conflict. Internal harmony and external conflict are the opposite sides of the same shield.

4.6 ACCOMMODATION

Conflict is a continuous intermittent-societal process. Accommodation is resolution of conflicts which means adjusting oneself to the new environment. Accommodation denotes acquired changes in the behaviour of their environment. According to MacIver, “the term accommodation refers particularly to the process on which man attains a sense of harmony with his environments. Besides this, as a process, accommodation is the sequence of steps by which persons are reconciled to changed conditions of life through the formation of the changed conditions themselves. Accommodation is a term used by the sociologists to describe the adjustment of hostile individuals or groups. Accommodation is the process by which the individuals and groups make the necessary internal adjustments to social situation which have been created by competition and conflict. Accommodation is associated with the social order that is fixed and established in custom and the mores. Assimilation implies a more thorough going transformation of the personality – transformation which takes place gradually under the influence of social contacts of the most concrete and intimate sort.

4.7 LET US SUM UP

The interactions – cooperation, competition and conflict are elementary, universal and fundamental form. Generally, social contact initiates interaction. Interaction refers to an action done in response to another action, but when this interaction through repetition leads to a result, then it is called a social process. The essential elements of social process are:

- i) sequence of events,
- ii) repetition of events,
- iii) relationship between events,
- iv) continuity of events; and
- v) Special result.

Not only this, there are some classification which classify social behaviour on the basis of (a) their intrinsic nature, (b) inherent drives, instincts, interests, drives and (c) the observable behaviour upon which observers can agree. In this context we are concerned with the fundamental types, i.e., cooperation, competition, conflict, accommodation and assimilation. People come together in groups to socialise to get things done, or because they require to do so. Much of what we accomplish as individuals and as groups depends on our ability to get others to work with us on common tasks and fort mutually acceptable goals.

Group functions may be centralised or decentralised, may be simple or complex. But what we are referring to is the process known as cooperation – working

together for mutually acceptable goals. Cooperation may involve merely our participation in a set of mutually understood role behaviours. The kind of cooperation that takes place between individuals occupying positions of unequal power and status actually amounts obedience or compliance. Cooperation at a more advanced level may take place in problem-solving situations – situations that have a relatively high degree of ambiguity and a low degree of structural or predictability. Cooperation involves mutual goals, but competition is concerned with personal goals. In competition, individual try to secure a greater-than-equal share of the rewards available to members of the group.

Common-sense attitudes towards competition are based on the traditional idea that there is only a fixed quantity available for use or distribution of the “good things in life” – economic advantages, comfort, fame, happiness and the like. In as much as people are attracted in order to satisfy social need, how members feel about the groups in which they participate in an important consideration. Traditional societies are likely to be less competitive than urban, industrialised societies. Life in urbanised societies offers many opportunities, large or small, to prove oneself competitively. Today we are much concerned about involving people throughout the world in large-scale problem-solving. The problems of the world – health, education, peace and war, preservation of the ecology, allocation of scarce resources – can not be solved by individual people or individual nations. They can be solved only by cooperation and collaboration. Besides this, social contact, which inevitably initiates conflict, accommodation, or assimilation invariably, creates sympathies, prejudices, personal and moral relations, which modify, complicate and control competition.

Conflict, assimilation and accommodation are all intimately related to control. Competition is universal in the world of living things. The cumulative effects of innovations, technological revolution, environmental crisis, generation gap, new value orientation, break-up of the normative structure etc are the factors which create conflicts. Social interaction is the reciprocal influences which human being exert on each other through inter stimulation and response. Social interaction and social process are interrelated factors. Society is an expression of different social processes and there are variety forms of social processes. Among the various processes, cooperation, conflict and competition are the important one.

4.8 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) What is social interaction?
- 2) What do you mean by the term social process?
- 3) Is there any relationship between competition and conflict? – Discuss.
- 4) Write in brief about the causes and characteristics of conflict.
- 5) Elucidate briefly about cooperation.
- 6) What are the general types of conflicts?
- 7) Elucidate briefly about accommodation.

4.9 GLOSSARY

- Attitude** : An enduring system of evaluations or feelings in favor of or against a person or group.
- Communication** : The exchange of meaning and mutual influence.
- Competition** : Competition is impersonal, unconscious, continuous struggle between individuals or groups for satisfaction which, because of their limited supply, all may not have. Competition is that form of social action in which we strive against each other for the possession of or use of some limited material or non-material good.
- Conflict** : Conflict is the social process in which individuals or groups seek their ends by directly challenging the antagonist by violence or threat of violence.
- Cooperation** : Cooperation is a form of social interaction wherein two or more persons work together to gain a common end. It is the process by which individuals or groups combine their effort, in a more or less organised way for the attainment of common objective.
- Group** : Two or more people who interact and influence one another.
- Group dynamics** : The way in which changes take in the behaviour of other members of the group. Groups can mobilise powerful force which may be constructive or destructive.
- Interaction** : Interaction is a two-way process whereby each individual or group stimulates the other and in varying degrees which modifies the behaviour of the participants.
- Social cohesion** : Degree to which group members share common beliefs, practices and values and thus act together.
- Social distance** : Degree to which individuals are willing to interact with people from different social background.

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