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Chapter Name: Conflict and negotiation

Today's Agenda

1. Conflict – definition
2. Different perspectives on Conflict
 1. The traditional viewpoint
 2. The Interactionist viewpoint
 3. The Resolution – focused viewpoint
3. The Conflict process
 1. Stage I
 2. Stage II
 3. Stage III
 4. Stage IV
 5. Stage V
4. Managing Functional conflict

1

Conflict – Definition

Conflict has a considerable amount of influence on employee behaviour, performance, satisfaction and organizational effectiveness.



A process that begins when one party perceives that another has negatively affected or is about to negatively affect something that the first party cares about

- Conflicts may be open and violent or in the form of a subtle disagreement.
- People experience conflict due to incompatibility of goals or disagreement over expected behaviours or differences in the way facts are interpreted, etc.

2

Different perspectives on Conflicts

Different scholars have seen the role of conflicts in groups and organizations differently. These different perspectives can be classified into 3 categories :-

1. The traditional viewpoint
2. The interactionist viewpoint
3. The resolution- focused viewpoint

2.1 The Traditional viewpoint

The traditional viewpoint was that all kinds of conflicts are bad and harmful. It was a sign of malfunctioning in the group.

- A conflict was considered something negative and was associated with violence, destruction and irrationality.
- The traditional viewpoint was that conflict was a dysfunctional outcome caused by:
 - a) poor communication
 - b) Lack of trust and openness between individuals
 - c) Failure of the manager to fulfil the needs and aspirations of the employees.
- According to this viewpoint, to avoid conflicts the manager must first identify the causes of conflict and then take steps to correct the situation.
- The correction will result in improved group and organizational performance.

2.2 The Interactionist viewpoint

This viewpoint not only accepted conflicts but also proposed that conflicts must be encouraged.

- It looked at conflict as a positive force that was absolutely necessary for a group to perform better.
- According to the INTERACTIONIST viewpoint, the absence of conflicts make groups stagnant, lethargic and non responsive to the need for change and innovation.
- In order for the group to be creative, self-critical and vibrant – the leaders must ensure a minimum level of conflict.
- The interactionist viewpoint categorised conflicts as *functional* and *dysfunctional*.
- *Functional conflicts* are constructive in nature. They help the group in achieving its goals and results and also improving performance.
- *Dysfunctional conflicts* are destructive in nature. They hinder the group's performance.

2.2 The Interactionist viewpoint

Whether a conflict is functional or dysfunctional depends on the type and level of conflict.

- There are three types of conflict:-

1. Task Conflict

- Task conflicts are often with regards to the content and goals of work.
- *Low or moderate level* of task conflict are functional in nature as they encourage discussion, creativity, innovation and an improvement in group performance.
- *High level of task conflict* are disruptive/ dysfunctional in nature as they lead to intense arguments and uncertainty about task role (what to do) causing the final outcome of decreased team performance, greater time take in completion of tasks and group members working at cross-purposes.
- The benefit of task conflicts are seen only when the group shares a high level of trust as risk taking ability increases and so does the openness of team members.

2.2 The Interactionist viewpoint

2. Relationship Conflict

- The focus of these conflicts is on interpersonal relationships between people.
- Managers spend about 18% of their time in sorting out personality clashes.
- Relationship conflicts are usually dysfunctional as there are hostilities and personality clashes.
- This affects understanding between people and creates obstacles in the completion of organizational tasks.

3. Process Conflict

- The issue at the core of this conflict is how the work should be done.
- Low levels of process conflict are functional
- However, if process conflicts become intense then they become dysfunctional.

2.2 The Interactionist viewpoint

Some problems associated with the INTERACTIONIST viewpoint are as follows. This also cause researchers to come up with resolution-focused viewpoint.

- A. Workplace conflicts are not always productive as they take managers time from their main tasks such as interacting with customers.
- B. They cause hurt feelings and some anger residue in the employees involved in the conflict even after the conflict is resolved.
- C. Task conflicts often escalate to relationship conflicts and sometimes it's quite blur and difficult to categorise.
- D. Conflicts cause stress and make people more close minded and confrontational in their approach.
- E. Conflicts reduce trust and cooperation, resulting in negatively affecting group cohesiveness and respect amongst group members,

2.3 The Resolution – focused viewpoint

Due to the problems with the INTERACTIONIST viewpoint, researchers d focusing in managing the context in which the conflict occurs.

- The resolution – focused viewpoint recognises that conflicts in organisation are inevitable but focuses more in how conflicts can be productively resolved,
- It is focused more on minimising the negative and disruptive effects of conflict.
- A number of studies found that the negative effects of conflict can be minimised by:
 1. Preparing people for conflicts
 2. Developing resolution strategies
 3. Encouraging open discussions
 4. Developing greater sensitivity to people from different cultures by understanding their social identities and hidden emotional attachments. This in turn helps in building bonds based on common interests.

3

The Conflict process

Robbins and Judge (2013) have proposed a model that attempts to explain how conflict occurs.

According to the model, there are five stages in the conflict process:

1. STAGE I: Potential opposition
2. STAGE II: Cognition and personalization
3. STAGE III: Intentions
4. STAGE IV: Behaviour
5. STAGE V: Outcomes

3.1 Stage I: Potential opposition or incompatibility

- Sources or cause of conflict may or may not lead to a conflict but their presence is essential for conflict to occur .
- The different causes of conflict can be divided into 3 categories:
 1. Communication
 - Communication that lacks clarity is a potential source of conflict. These conflicts may be in account of:
 - a) Semantic barriers – the same words having different meanings to different people.
 - b) Misunderstanding – causes confusion in the communication
 - c) Jargons – use of technical terms
 - d) Inadequate information – causes ambiguity
 - e) Obstruction or noise in the communication channels.
 2. Stuctural
 - Structure in an organization means the degree to which tasks are specialised, size of the group/organization, the degree of jurisdiction clarity (who is responsible of performing which tasks or duties), leadership reward system, extent to which one group is dependent on another etc.

3.1 Stage I: Potential opposition or incompatibility

Research has found that:

- a) the larger the group greater the possibility of conflicts.
- b) More specialisation of tasks in the organization, greater the potential of conflicts.
- c) When members are young and have spent less time in the organization, the possibility of conflicts is higher.
- d) The potential of conflict is higher when employee turnover is high.
- e) When there is ambiguity over the duties and responsibilities, the likelihood of conflicts is higher.
- f) Lack of goal compatibility between different groups in the organization increases the potential for conflicts.
- g) When groups are interdependent rather than dependent, the potential of conflict is higher.
- h) When the reward systems are in the form of all-or-none. That is, one person gains at the cost of other - the potential of conflict is higher.

3.1 Stage I: Potential opposition or incompatibility

3. Personality Characteristics

- We get along wonderfully with some people and cannot stand the sight of some people because individuals differ in the way they look, think, feel and act.
- Such differences in the personalities of individuals often lead to conflict.
- People also differ in their values and beliefs. This could also lead to conflicts.
- Research has found that:
 - a) Individuals who are high on traits of disagreeableness, neurocriticism and self monitoring are more likely to get involved in conflicts.
 - b) Authoritarian and dogmatic personalities are more likely to be involved in conflicts.
 - c) Irritated and angry individuals annoy others and increases the potential for conflicts.

3.2 Stage II: Cognition & Personalization

- For conflict to occur, the perception of conflict is essential.
- Perception of conflict refers to the awareness of conflict conditions.
- Conflict may not occur if the concerned parties do not notice or deliberately over look the issue.

Definition of perceived conflict



Awareness by one or more parties of the existence of conditions that create opportunities for conflict to rise.
ROBBINS AND JUDGE, 2013

- Perception of conflict doesn't directly lead to personalization of conflict.
- People experience anxiety, tension, frustration and hostility only when there is a shift from perception level conflict to 'felt conflict' level.
- At the felt level, the individual becomes emotionally involved and there is personalization of conflict.

3.2 Stage II: Cognition & Personalization

2 important features of this stage are:-

1. The conflict is defined

Defining the conflict plays an important role in determining the outcomes and possible settlements. The people involved in the conflict decide what the conflict is all about.

2. Emotions strongly influence perceptions

Research has found that:

- a) Negative emotions result in lack of trust, negative outlook towards opposite parties and their actions.
- b) Positive emotions give a broader perspective to the problem, understand the problem and elements attached to it and try to come out with a solution.

3.3 Stage III: Intentions

- Stage I and II does not necessarily mean that a conflict will break out.
- Intentions intervene and determine the direction of the conflict.
- *Intentions are decisions to act in a given way.*
- Many a times conflicts escalate because one party wrongly interprets the intentions of the other party.
- Parties infer each other's intentions and determine how they respond. However, there could be a gap between how a person behaves and his intentions.
- The conflict handling intentions of the participants in the conflict is an outcome of two dimensions:

1. Cooperation

The degree to which a person attempts to satisfy the concerns of the other person or party.

2. Assertiveness

The degree to which a person attempts to satisfy his own concerns.

3.3 Stage III: Intentions

- Depending on the level of cooperation and assertiveness, Robbins and Judge (2013) identified 5 conflict handling intentions:
1. Compromising
 - A compromise occurs when both parties give up something and agree to share the object that is the cause of the conflict.
 - It occurs with moderate levels of cooperativeness and assertiveness.
 - There is no clear winner or loser and neither of the parties are completely satisfied with the solution.
 2. Competing
 - A person with a competing intention is assertive but uncooperative.
 - This is an aggressive and dominating strategy and has little concerns for the interest of others.

3.3 Stage III: Intentions

3. Avoiding

- A person with an avoiding intention is both unassertive and uncooperative.
- This person has little concern and thus physically and mentally withdraws himself from the conflict.
- He tries to suppress the conflict either by ignoring the conflict or by keeping away from those that he disagrees with.

4. Accomodating

- A person with an accommodating intention is cooperative but unassertive.
- This person is more concerned with keeping the opponent happy and satisfying the concerns of others even though he doesn't agree with it.

5. Collaborating

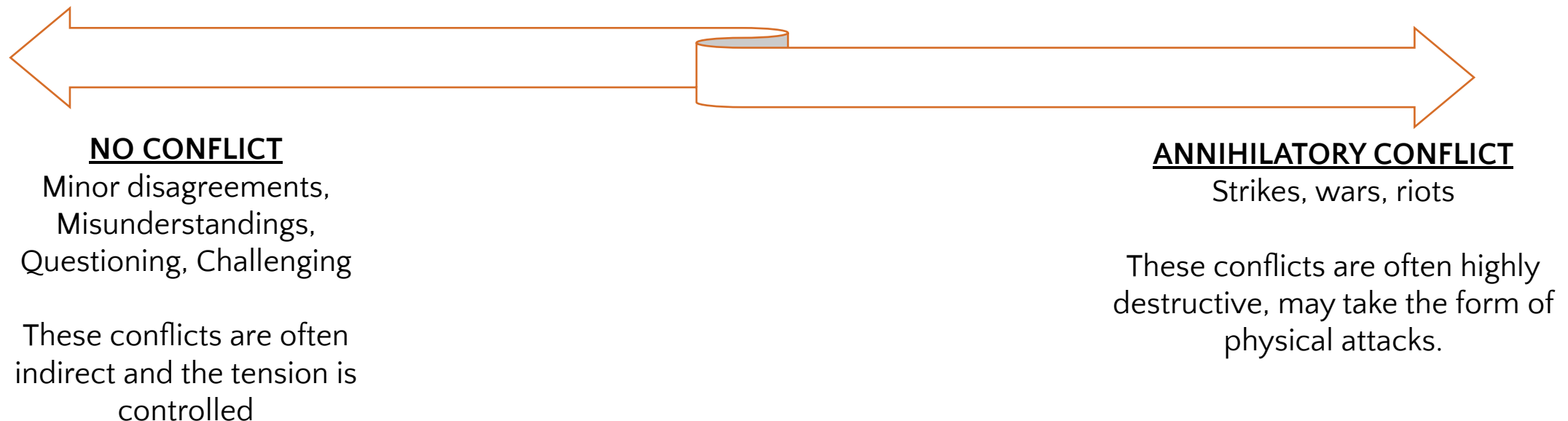
- A person with a collaborating approach is both assertive and cooperative.
- The aim is to come up with a solution that is mutually satisfactory and acceptable to both.
- An attempt is made to clear the differences and misunderstandings and the focus is on a win-win outcome that maximises the benefits for both the sides.

3.3 Stage III: Intentions

- The intentions of parties involved in the conflict are not fixed and may change during the course of conflict.
- This happens because they see each others point of view or they respond emotionally to the behaviour of other people.
- Research has found that people have a preference or an underlying disposition for one of the five conflict handling intentions.
- These preferences are largely determined by a person's intelligence and his personality characteristics.

3.4 Stage IV-Behaviour

- This is a dynamic process of interaction in the form of statements, counter statements, actions and reactions of the conflicting parties.
- However the behaviour does not accurately reflect the intentions of the parties either due to lack of skills or miscalculations.
- Based on their intensity, all conflicts can be represented as:



3.4 Stage IV-Behaviour

- Functional conflicts are usually low in intensity and fall at the lower end of the continuum.
- Conflicts that are high in intensity and fall at the upper end of the continuum are usually dysfunctional in nature.
- Conflicts within proportions are actually beneficial to the organization.
- Hence, sometimes in case of low or no conflicts, managers need to escalate conflicts.

3.4 Stage IV-Behaviour

Robbins and Judge (2013) have suggested some conflict management techniques that managers can use to control dysfunctional conflicts:

1. Problem solving

The conflicting parties engage in face-to-face meetings for identifying the problem and then have discussions to resolve the problem.

2. Superordinate goals

A shared goal that includes the interests of the conflicting parties is created in such a way that it cannot be achieved without the two conflicting parties cooperating with each other.

3. Expansion of resources

Sometimes the scarcity of place, money, promotions and other resources is often the cause of conflict. By increasing the availability of these resources a win-win solution can be created.

4. Avoidance

The individual withdraws from the conflict.

3.4 Stage IV-Behaviour

5. Smoothing

Focus is placed in the common interests between the conflicting parties and downplays the differences.

6. Compromise

Each party gives up something that is important and of value to them in order to reach a settlement,

7. Authoritative command

The management takes charge of the situation and uses its authority and power to resolve the conflict. The decision is then communicated to the conflicting parties.

8. Altering the human variable

Sometimes conflicts are because of personal factors. Attempts are made to change faulty attitudes and behaviours through human relations training.

9. Altering the structural variable

Attempts are made to reduce conflicts by making changes in the organisational structural variable. People are transferred, jobs redesigned, interaction patterns are changed.

3.4 Stage IV-Behaviour

In case of low or no conflicts, managers need to escalate conflicts.

- Robbins and Judge (2013) have suggested the following conflict-stimulation technique:

1. Communication

By giving ambiguous messages, managers can cause confusion in communication or miscommunication. This may increase conflict levels in the organization.

2. Introducing outsiders

Employees with different attitudes, values and/or managerial styles are added to the group.

3. Restructuring the organization

Changes such as introduction of new rules and policies, realignment of work groups, need for greater interdependence are introduced in the organization. Employees are forced to come out of their comfort zone.

4. Appointment of devil's advocate

A person who intentionally criticises and challenges the decisions made by the majority.

3.5 Stage V- Outcomes

- Conflicts have consequences – functional (there is an improvement) or dysfunctional (adversely affected)
- Low to moderate levels of task and process conflicts lead to functional outcomes. It improves the effectiveness of the group in the following ways:
 - Functional outcomes
 1. Conflicts lead to an **improvement in the quality of decisions**.
 2. Conflicts encourage the group to be **creative and develop innovative solutions**.
 3. Conflicts provide an opportunity to **express and release the tension** that has build up.
 4. Conflict encourages a **rethinking of group goals** and activities and introduces changes. It provides a platform for open discussions on higher-order goals.
 5. The **curiosity and interest** of group members is aroused.
 6. Conflicts provide a platform to the employees to **share their problems and concerns**.
 7. Conflicts create an environment where employees **self-evaluate, become more aware and are motivated to change**.
 8. It **prevent groupthink** from setting in. The group is forced to look at other alternatives.

3.5 Stage V- Outcomes

- The destructive or harmful effects of conflicts are known as dysfunctional outcomes.
- They have several negative effects on the organization's performance:
- Dysfunctional outcomes
 1. Conflicts create **disconnect among members** of the group which may lead to destruction and may threaten the survival of the organization.
 2. Conflicts causes **miscommunication** between groups or divisions which eliminates coordination between them and may bring the functioning of the group to a grinding halt.
 3. Regular conflicts has an **adverse effect on group cohesiveness**.
 4. Conflicts **reduce trust and satisfaction** of group members.
 5. **5. Group goals take a back seat** and all focus is on the fighting among the group members.
 6. **6. Conflicts cause demoralisation** among employees.
 7. **7. It causes managers to shift from a participative to an authoritarian style of management.**
 8. **8. Conflicts diverts attention and energies** away from major tasks and organizational goals.

3.5 Stage V- Outcomes

Research has found that heterogenous groups (members having different interests) are better than homogenous groups (members having similar interests) because:

1. They produce **higher quality solution**
2. There is **greater sharing of information** between the members when they differ from each other in their work styles and experience.
3. There is an **increase in creativity**.
4. There is improvement in the **quality of decisions**.
5. They produce more **effective and practical ideas**.
6. Members become more **flexible and accepting of change**.

4

Managing Functional Conflict

Managers are eager to know how to create conflicts that are functional and manage them:

1. Recognising Disagreements

- To recognise real disagreements and thus minimising the negative effects of conflicts.
- Often conflicts are due to differences in the language and such disagreements can be resolved.
- Disagreements should be resolved by encouraging free and frank discussions that focus on interests rather than issues.
- Allowing each group to get their top needs satisfied by letting them participate in finding solutions that are most important to them.

4

Managing Functional Conflict

2. Discussing differences

- To have open discussions on those opinions on which there are differences.
- An open discussion allows members to develop a common perception and move towards a mutually acceptable solution.
- Managers can ask members not to take the conflict personally and get the group to focus on common interests.
- A group that has a cooperative style rather than a competitive style is more effective in conflict management.
- A group that strongly identifies with the group goals is more open to discussions.

4

Managing Functional Conflict

3. Recognising Cultural Differences

- An understanding of cultural differences can also help in the management of conflict
- In collectivistic culture – people are seen as integral part of any situation and hence managers from such culture focus more on preserving relationships and promoting common good.
- Managers from collectivistic culture use indirect resolution methods, show more concern and take the help of third parties.
- This is not the case in individualistic culture where people and social situations are seen as independent.
- In individualistic culture, the approach is very different. It is more direct and they prefer to confront differences in opinion and deal with them more openly.