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 arises "when two or more parties, with perceived incompatible goals seek to undermine each other's goal seeking capability".
- Organizational conflict is disagreement between two or more organizational members or groups arising from the fact that they must share scarce resources or work activities and/or from the fact that they have different statuses, goals, values, or perceptions."

NATURE OF CONFLICT

A state of conflict is characterized by the following features:

1. It arises when two or more individuals or groups think differently.

2. It is caused by different perceptions that different individuals hold about the same object or goal.

3. It usually arises because of scarcity of resources. When people compete for scarce resources, they hold different views about how best they can utilize those resources to achieve the organisational goals.

CAUSES or SOURCES OF CONFLICT

Conflict arise due to the following reasons:

1. *Differences in perception*: Differences in perceptions, values and attitudes of individuals or groups over the same problem leads to interpersonal or intergroup conflicts.

2. *Excessive competition*: Organisational resources are scarce and each unit wants maximum share of it. Competition amongst units for maximum share of resources leads to conflict.

3. *Difference in goals:* Different goals of individuals or groups leads to conflict amongst them.

4. *Interdependence of tasks*: When work is passed from one unit to the other, interdependence amongst each units can lead to conflict.

5. *Habit patterns*: Some people like to argue and debate. They enjoy conflict as a matter of habit. It acts as a motivator for them to improve their performance.

6. *Personal Characteristics*: When group members differ in work attitudes, age, education, temperament and status levels, the potential for inter-group conflict is high.

7. *Ill- defined authority- responsibility relationships:* When authority and responsibility of individuals and groups is not properly defined, people do not understand each other's role. There is lack of consistency in work activities and communication distortions take place. This becomes a source of inter-group conflict.

CONFLICT PROCESS/ STAGES OF A CONFLICT EPISODE

The conflict process can be categorized into five stages. They are as follows:

Stage I: Potential opposition or incompatibility:

This covers the present condition that creates opportunity for conflicts to arise. This may be one of the conditions responsible for the occurrence of conflict. The major sources of conflict can be further categorized as communication, structure and personal variables.

Stage II: Cognition and personalization:

Perception or sense making plays a major role in the resolving conflict. Conflict may either be perceived or felt in nature. Perceived conflict is defined as awareness by one or more parties of the existence of conditions that create opportunities for conflict to arise. Felt conflict is defined as emotional involvement in a conflict creating anxiety, tenseness, frustrations or hostility. Negative emotions have been found to produce over simplification of issues, reductions in trust, and negative interpretations of the other party's behavior.

Stage III: Intentions:

Using two dimensions – cooperativeness (the degree to which one party attempts to satisfy the other party's concerns) and assertiveness (the degree to which one party attempts to satisfy his or her own concerns) – five conflict handling intentions can be identified.

There are as follows:

a. competing (assertive and uncooperative), b. collaborating (assertive and cooperative), c. avoiding (unassertive and uncooperative), d. accommodating (unassertive and cooperative) and e. compromising (mid-range on both assertiveness and cooperativeness).

Stage IV: Behavior:

All conflicts manifest in behavior somewhere along with continuum ranging from no conflict or minor conflict such as minor disagreements or misunderstanding, overt questioning or challenging of others, to annihilate conflict such as threats and ultimatum, aggressive physical attacks or overt efforts to destroy the other party.

Stage V: Outcomes:

The outcomes of conflict may be functional or dysfunctional. Conflict is constructive when it improves the quality of decision, stimulates creativity and innovation, encourages interest and curiosity among group members, provides the medium through which problems can be aired and tensions released and fosters an environment of self-evaluation and change.

CONSEQUENCES OF CONFLICT

Conflict has both positive and negative consequences. Positive conflict is known as functional conflict and negative conflict is known as dysfunctional conflict.

POSITIVE CONFLICT (Functional Conflict):

Positive consequences of conflict are as follows:

1. High degree of cohesion

2. Improvement in quality of decisions

3. Emergence of leaders

4. Response to change

5. Increased productivity

6. Releases strain

NEGATIVE CONFLICT (Dysfunctional Conflict):

In negative conflict, people show disrespect for others' ideas. They aim to promote their interests at the cost of others. The negative consequences of conflict are as follows:

1. Mental Strain

2. Discontentment

3. Communication Breakdown

4. Resignation

5. Distorted Perceptions

6. Competitive Struggle

7. Subordination of group goals to individual goals

8. Threat to group's survival

MANAGEMENT OF CONFLICT

There is always an optimum level of conflict at which organisational performance is highest. When the level of conflict is low, the organisation will not be adaptive to change. This threatens its long-run survival. When the level of conflict is too high, it creates chaos and disruptions in the organization. This also threatens its long-run survival.

There is need, therefore, for managers to resolve conflict. They should promote functional or constructive conflict and avoid dysfunctional or destructive conflict.

Management of conflict involves:

1. Stimulation of functional conflict

2. Resolution of dysfunctional conflict

CONFLICT RESOLUTION/ CONFLICT MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

a. Avoidance: One should avoid or postpone conflict by ignoring it or changing the subject. Avoidance can be useful as a temporary measure to buy time or as an expedient means of dealing with minor, non recurring conflicts. In more severe cases, conflict avoidance can involve severing a relationship or leaving a group.

b. Collaboration: People should work together to find a mutually beneficial solution to the problem. Though this is a win-win solution to conflict, collaboration can also be time- intensive and inappropriate if there is absence of trust, respect or communication among participants.

c. Compromise: Conflicting parties find a middle ground in which early party is partially satisfied.

d. Competition: Both the parties should assert their viewpoint at the potential expense of another. It can be useful when achieving one's objectives outweighs one's concern for the relationship.

e. Accommodation: If above measures do not help to resolve conflict. one party surrenders its needs and wishes to accommodate the other party.