CONCEPT

Conflicts are natural in all walks of daily life — both at workplace and home. Thus, conflict is ever present and both charming and maddening. But conflict is a complex and big subject. There are many sources of conflict. Conflict occurs when individuals or groups are not obtaining what they need or want and are seeking their own self- interest.

Sometimes the individual is not aware of the need and unconsciously starts to actout. Other times, the individual is very aware of what he or she wants and actively works at achieving the goal. It would be better to identify conflict at an early stageand come to an understanding.

The concept of conflict is controversial. Psychologists and sociologists have given different meanings. It is being defined as a process by few, an obstructive behavior, and goal incompatibility by others. Conflict can be expressed as:

Conflict is a process, where perception (real or otherwise) leads to disruption of desirable state of harmony and stability in an interdependent world.

STAGES OF CONFLICT:
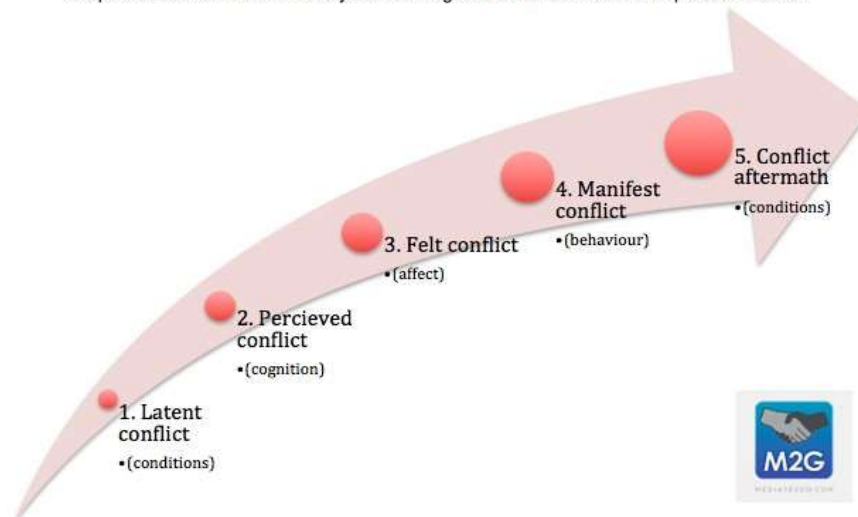
1. Latent Conflict:

Latent conflict is the stage in which factors exist in the situation which could become potential conflict inducing forces.

Four basic types of latent conflict are:

(i) Competition for scarce resources
(ii) Drive for autonomy (independent)

(iii) Divergence (separation) of goals

(iv) Role conflict (fight)

Stages of Conflict

Adapted based on Louis R. Pondy's article Organizational Conflict: Concepts and Models

5. Conflict aftermath
•(conditions)

4. Manifest conflict
•(behaviour)

3. Felt conflict
•(affect)

2. Percieved conflict
•(cognition)

1. Latent conflict
•(conditions)

M2G

2. Perceived Conflict:

Conflicts may sometimes arise even if no conditions of latent conflict exist. This isthe stage when one party perceives the other to be likely to thwart or frustrate his or her goals. The case, in which conflict is perceived when no latent conflict arises, is said to result from the parties misunderstanding each other's true position. Such conflict can be resolved by improving communication between the groups.

3. Felt Conflict:

Felt conflict is the stage when the conflict is not only perceived but actually felt and recognised. For example, A may be aware that he is in serious argument with B over some policy. But this may not make A tense or anxious and it may have no effect, whatsoever, on A‟s affection towards B. The personalization of conflict is the mechanism which causes many people to be concerned with dysfunctions of conflict.In other words, it makes them feel the conflict.

There are two reasons for the personalization of the conflict:

(i) **The inconsistent demands** on efficient organisation and individual growth which is

caused within the individual. Anxieties may also result from crisis or from extra-organisational pressures. Individuals need to vent these anxieties in order to maintain internal equilibrium.

(ii) **Conflict becomes personalized** when the whole personality of the individual is involved in the relationship. Hostile feelings are most common in the intimate relations that characterize various institutions and residential colleges.

4. Manifest Conflict:

Manifest conflict is the stage when the two parties engage in behaviours which evoke responses from each other. The most obvious of these responses are open aggression, apathy, sabotage, withdrawal and perfect obedience to rules. Except for prison riots, political revolutions and extreme labour unrest, violence as a form of manifest conflict is rare. The motives towards violence may remain but they tend to be expressed in less violent forms.

5. Conflict Aftermath:

The aftermath of a conflict may have positive or negative repercussions for the organisation depending upon how the conflict is resolved. If the conflict is genuinely resolved to the satisfaction of all participants, the basis for a more cooperative relationship may be laid; or the participants in their drive for a more ordered relationship may focus on latent conflicts not previously perceived and dealt with.

On the other hand, if the conflict is merely suppressed but not resolved, the latent conditions of conflict may be aggravated and explode in a more serious form until they are rectified. This conflict episode is called „conflict aftermath." Conflict resolution has been added as an additional box in the figure to elucidate the conflict aftermath is a direct function of the results of the conflict resolution style adopted andexercised in any given situation.

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF CONFLICT

The inter-actionist view does not propose that all conflicts are good. There are both positive and negative aspects of conflicts. Boulding recognizes that some optimum level of conflict and associated personal stress and tension are necessary for progress and productivity, but he portrays conflict primarily as a potential and social cost.

Similarly, Kahn views that "one might as well make a case for interpreting some conflict as essential for the continued development of mature and competent human beings, but they feel that conflict has a social cost."

Thus, we can say that the conflicts which support the goals of the group and improve its performance are known as functional conflicts. On the other hand, there are conflicts that hinder group performance; these are dysfunctional or destructive forms of conflict.

The demarcation between functional and dysfunctional is neither clear nor precise.

Positive aspects of conflicts (Functional Conflicts)

If we look at conflict from functional point of view, conflicts are supposed to serve the following functions:

1. Release of Tension

Conflict when expressed can clear the air and reduce the tension which mightotherwise remain suppressed. Suppression of tension can lead to imaginative distortion of truth, sense of frustration and tension, high mental exaggerations and biased opinions resulting in fear and distrust. When members express themselves, they get some psychological satisfaction. This also leads to reduction of stressamong the involved members.

2. Analytical Thinking

When a group is faced with a conflict, the members display analytical thinking in identifying various alternatives. In absence of conflict, they might not have been creative or even might have been lethargic. The conflicts may induce challenge to such views, opinions, rules, policies, goals and plans which would require a critical analysis in order to justify these as they are or make such changes that may be required.

3. Group Cohesiveness

Inter group conflict brings about closeness and solidarity among the group members.It develops group loyalty and greater sense of group identity in order to compete with the outsiders. This increases the degree of group cohesiveness which can be utilizedby the management for the attainment of organisational goals in an effective manner. As cohesiveness increases, differences are forgotten.

4. Competition

Conflicts promote competition and hence it results in increased efforts. Some persons are highly motivated by conflict and severe competition. Such conflict and competition, thus, lead to high level of effort and output.

5. Challenge

Conflicts test the abilities and capacities of the individuals and groups. It creates challenges for them for which they have to be dynamic and creative. If they are able to overcome the challenge, it will lead to search for alternatives to existing patterns which leads to organisational change and development.

6. Stimulation for Change

Sometimes, conflict stimulates change among the people. When they are faced witha conflict, they might change their attitudes and be ready to change themselves to meet the requirements of the situation.

7. Identification of Weaknesses

When a conflict arises, it may help in identifying the weaknesses in the system. Oncethe management comes to know about the weaknesses, if can always take the steps to remove them.

8. Awareness

Conflict creates awareness of what problems exist, who is involved and how to solve the problem. Taking cue from this, management can take the necessary action.

9. High Quality Decisions

When conflicting, persons express their opposing views and perspectives, high quality decisions result. The people share their information and check each other reasoning to develop new decisions.

10. Enjoyment

Conflict adds to the fun of working with others when not taken seriously. Many people find conflict enjoyable to competitive sports, games, movies, plays and books.

Negative Aspects of Conflict (Dysfunctional Conflicts)

The dysfunctional aspects of the conflicts can be visualized in the following ways:

1. High Employee Turnover

In case of intra-individual and inter-individual conflicts particularly, some dynamic personnel may leave the organisation, if they fail to resolve the conflict in their favour. In this case, organisation will be the sufferer in the long run due to the loss of key people.

2. Tensions

Sometimes, conflict can cause high level of tensions among the individuals and groups and a stage may come when it becomes difficult for the management to resolve the conflicts. This will result in anxiety, frustration, uncertainty and hostility among the members.

3. Dissatisfaction

Conflict will result in discontentment to the losing party, who will wait for an opportunity to settle the score with the winning party. All this tussle will result in less concentration on the job and as a result, the productivity will suffer.

4. Climate of Distrust

Conflict often creates a climate of distrust and suspicion among the members of the group as well the organisation. The degree of cohesiveness will be less as the discords will be more. The concerned people will have negative feelings towards each other and try to avoid interaction with each other.

5. Personal Vs. Organisational Goals

Conflicts may distract the attention of the members of the organisation from organisational goals. They may waste their time and energy in finding ways and tactics to come out as winners in the conflict. Personal victory becomes more important than the organisational goals.

6. Conflict as a Cost

Conflict is not necessarily a cost for the individuals. But the conflicts may weaken the organisation as a whole, if the management is not able to handle them properly. If the management tries to suppress conflicts, they may acquire gigantic proportions in the later stages. And if the management does not interfere in the earlier stages, unnecessary troubles

may be invited at the later stages. It is a cost to the organisation, because resignations of personnel weaken the organisation, feeling of distrust among members have negative impact on productivity and so on.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

The management within an organisation should function in such a way so as to maximize the co-ordination of human resources and work system and to minimize conflict. There may be two approaches for managing organisational conflict: preventive measures and curative measures.

In the **preventive measures**, management tries to create an environment where dysfunctional conflicts do not take place. Conflict is not preliminary a result of individual neurotic traits but arises under given conditions even when people involved are well adjusted. Since situational variables include conflict, it is possible tomodify situational so as to avoid conflict.

However, there may not be any specific standard of situation in which conflict will not grow: there might be certain positive programmes and actions that might reasonably lead to avoidance of conflict in the organisation. The development of effective leadership, participation decision making, effective two-way communication with proper emphasis on upward communication, improvement in interpersonal relationship, provision for facilities and opportunities to develop, informal group may be some of the ways to which management should pay special attention.

The **curative measures** include the resolution of conflict when they take place and become dysfunctional in the organisation. Such preventive and curative attempts are establishing common goals, changing structural arrangement, and conflict resolution.