

# Conflict Management Techniques

A conflict is a situation when the interests, needs, goals or values of involved parties interfere with one another. In the workplace, conflicts are common and inevitable. Different stakeholders may have different priorities; conflicts may involve team members, departments, projects, organization and client, boss and subordinate, organization needs vs. personal needs. Often, a conflict is a result of perception. Is conflict a bad thing? Not necessarily. Often, a conflict presents opportunities for improvement. Therefore, it is important to understand (and apply) various conflict resolution techniques. Conflict is both constructive and destructive. Constructive conflict should be stimulated and destructive should be resolved amicably.

## ❖ Stimulating conflict

Robbins has suggested the following strategies for stimulating constructive conflict:

1. Using communication- Management may send threatening or ambiguous messages to stimulate conflict. e.g. management may spread the message that their branch is to be closed down. This will reduce friction and they will try to find the ways and revise their existing practices.
2. Encouraging competition-Rewards ,bonus etc. can stimulate healthy competition between individuals and they will struggle hard to outperform other.
3. Reorganisation-Management may reorganise work group, increase interdependence and change rules to change the status quo. Employees will adjust to new situation and there will be improvement in the methods used.
4. Bringing in outsiders-In order to bring life in the old stagnant group new employees from different background can be brought.

## ❖ Preventing conflict

1. Reducing interdependence- Conflict between two departments is high when they are interdependent .So the best way is to reduce this interdependence by providing them separate resources.
2. Rotation of people-Through this method employees understand the problems of other departments and their mutual understanding also increases.
3. Superordinate goals- It is a common goal which appeals to all. Such goal cannot be achieved individually but requires cooperation between parties. e.g. when survival of the company is under threat then all the departments will work towards overcoming the threat.
4. Appointing liaison group-Under this method an intermediary may be appointed to remove the differences between parties. He must understand the problem of both the parties and should provide a solution which is mutually acceptable. He is considered to be unbiased having no vested interest in any party.

## ❖ Resolving conflict

1. **Avoidance/Withdrawal**-Under this strategy parties avoid dealing with conflict and pretend that conflict does not exist. Avoiding is used when the differences are irrelevant for the organisation. Individuals end up ignoring the problem assuming that conflict will resolve itself. Sometimes avoidance would mean that you neglect the responsibility that comes with it therefore it is better to confront the problem before it gets serious.
2. **Accommodation(Smoothing)**-Under this approach an individual set aside his own concerns to maintain peace and highlight similarities and areas of agreement. Management tries to appease the group members whose feelings have been hurt. The purpose is to reduce the intensity of the conflict. This method does not tackle the real issues which are likely to resurface soon. e.g. when some controversial issue is being discussed in a meeting tempers run high and then the chairman intervenes to cool down tempers.
3. **Compromising**- It is a process of bargaining where the parties negotiate on the basis of give and take to arrive at some agreement but it is not in the longterm interest because the basic problem is not solved rationally. This strategy is used commonly where the conflict arises due to differences in values or goals and it can be effective when the desired goals/resources can be divided.
4. **Competition**- Competition involves authoritative behaviour and involves direct attack to gain control over others. This approach uses means to attain what the individual thinks is right. It may aggravate the situation unless one party is strong enough to dominate other. This style is power oriented and based on win-lose strategy. Positive side of this method is that where quick decision is required this course of action can be taken and the negative side of this method is that a competitor may suppress or coerce other parties into conflict.
5. **Collaborating**- It involves an attempt to work with the other person to find solution that would be satisfying to both the parties. Hence, communication is an important part of this strategy. This style is high on cooperation. Question of who is right or wrong is avoided and the focus is on sharing information to avoid misunderstandings.

## Functional and Dysfunctional aspects of conflict

### Functions (Positive outcomes) of organisational conflict

1. **Creativity/Innovation**-When a group faces conflict, it puts pressure on them to search for imaginative solutions to problems. It brings creativity and encourages them to learn and develop.
2. **Releasing tension**-Conflict provides an opportunity to members to express their fears, doubts and obtain psychological satisfaction which leads to reduction of stress.
3. **Challenge**-Conflict tests 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 alternative pattern of behaviour, procedures of work etc.
4. **Stimulating change**-Sometimes, conflict stimulates change among the people. When they are faced with a conflict, they might change their attitudes and become willing to adapt themselves to change in situation.
5. **Identification of weaknesses**-When a conflict arises it may identify the weakness in the system. The management can steps to remove them.
6. **Group cohesiveness**- Conflict brings about solidarity among the group members and they show greater degree of group loyalty. The increase in the group cohesiveness can

be utilized by the management for the attainment of organizational goals in an effective manner.

7. Awareness-Conflict creates awareness about what is the problem ,who are involved and how the problem is solved.

### **Dysfunctions (negative aspects) of conflict**

- 1.Resignation of personnel- In case of interindividual and intraindividual conflict particularly, some dynamic personnel may leave the organisation if they fail in the resolution of conflicts in their favour. The organisation will be sufferer in the long run by the loss of key personnel.
2. Discontentment-Conflict is likely to be a source of dissatisfaction to the loosing party which will wait for an opportunity to settle the score with the winning party. As a result their productivity will suffer.
- 3.Tension- Conflict may create among the individuals and group and a stage may come where it is very difficult for the management to resolve the conflict. Excessive conflict generates feeling of anxiety, uncertainty, frustration and hostility among the members.
- 4.Creating distrust- Conflict may create a climate of suspicion and distrust among the people in the organisation. It may create discord in place of cooperation. The concerned people may develop negative feelings about one another and try to avoid interactions with each other.
- 5.Goal Displacement-Conflict may distract the attention of the organizational members from the organisational goals. They may waste their time and energy in findings tactics to come out as winners in the conflict. Personal victory becomes more important for them than the organisational goals.
6. Weakening of organisation-Conflict 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 proportion in the later stages. And if the management does not interfere in the earlier stages, unnecessary troubles might be invited at the later stages. Frequent conflicts may create tensions among the members and an atmosphere of distrust in the organisation. Further resignation or important personnel due to contacts will also weaken the organisation.

Source: Material has been taken from internet and various textbooks of organisation behaviour by 1. Dr.C.B.Gupta ,2.)Dr.Pardeep kumar 3.) Dr.T.N chhabra