Chapter 20

Management of Conflict

INTRODUCTION

> Whenever there is interaction there is conflict.

Conflict is an integral part of everyday life of an individual or of an organisation. We often hear people saying "There is conflict in his mind" or "They have conflicting views" or "They are in conflict". Whenever there is interaction there is conflict. According to W.Wrigley Jr "When two people in business always agree, one of them is unnecessary." Conflict has considerable influence on the behaviour, performance and satisfaction of employees. A manager often faces his most uncomfortable events when he has to deal with conflicts or differences among people or groups of people at work. Presence of conflicts complicates his job in so many ways. Therefore, it is very important that the manager should understand the concept of conflict fully and try to handle it effectively.

MEANING AND DEFINITION OF CONFLICT

> Conflict is associated with situations that involve contradictory or irreconcilable interest between two opposing groups.

Conflict can be defined in many ways and can be considered as an expression of hostility, negative attitudes, antagonism, aggression, rivalry and misunderstanding. It is also associated with situations that involve contradictory or irreconcilable interests between two opposing groups. A few definitions of conflict are as given below :

"A simple definition of conflict is that it is any tension which is experienced when one person perceives that one's needs or desires are or are likely to be thwarted or frustrated."

Follett simply defines conflict as, "the appearance of difference, difference of opinions, of interests."

Chung and Megginson define conflict as, "the struggle between incompatible or struggling needs, wishes, ideas, interests or people. Conflict arises when individuals or groups encounter goals that both parties cannot obtain satisfactorily."

According to David L. Austin, "It can be defined as a disagreement between two or more individuals or groups, with each individual or group trying to gain acceptance of its view or objectives over others."

Louis R. Pondy has given a very comprehensive definition of conflict. According to him the term conflict is used in four ways in the literature to describe :

(i) antecedent conditions of conflictful behaviour such as scarcity of resources or policy differences ;

(ii) affective states of individuals involved such as stress, tension, hostility, anxiety etc. ;

(iii) cognitive state of individuals, that is their perception or awareness of conflictual situation ; and

(iv) conflictual behaviour ranging from passive resistance to over aggression.

Thus, we can say that fighting, hostility and controversy, all of which can be called conflict, are nearly everyday fare for individuals and groups, although they are not always evident. It is an absolutely predictable social phenomenon and it should be channeled to useful purposes.

FEATURES OF CONFLICT

From the organisational point of view following are the broad features of conflict :

1. Conflict occurs when individuals are not able to choose among the available alternative courses of action.

2. Conflict between two individuals implies that they have conflicting perceptions, values and goals.

3. Conflict is a dynamic process as it indicates a series of events. Each conflict is made up of a series of interlocki .g conflict episodes.

4. Conflict must be perceived by the parties to it. If no one is aware of a conflict, then it is generally agreed that no conflict exists.

TRANSITIONS IN CONFLICT THOUGHT

There have been conflicting views over the role of conflict in groups and organisations. There are three different schools of thought emphasising different roles of conflict in organisations. These three schools of thought are :

(i) The Traditional View

(ii) The Human Relations View

(iii) The Interactionist View.

The views of all these schools of thought are explained as :

1. **The Traditional View.** According to the traditional view, conflict, by definition, was harmful and was to be avoided. This view was consistent with the attitudes that prevailed about human behaviour in the 1930s and 1940s. Traditionally, conflict was viewed negatively, and it was used synonymously with such terms as violence, destruction and irrationality. Conflict was seen as a dysfunctional outcome resulting from poor communication, a lack of openness and trust between people and the failures of the managers to be responsive to the needs and aspirations of the employee. Conflict could cause losses in productivity because groups would not cooperate in getting jobs finished and would not share important information. Too much conflict could also distract managers from their work and reduce their concentration on the job.

| Conflict was considered totally bad and was to be avoided. |

Thus, traditional writers had a very conservative view about conflict as they considered it totally bad and advocated that conflicts must be avoided, with the result that sometimes, there is a tendency to suppress conflict and push it under the rug. By ignoring the presence of conflict, we somehow try to wish it away. Both the scientific management approach and the administrative school of management relied

heavily on developing such organisational structures that would specify task, rules, regulations procedures and authority relationships so that if a conflict develops, then these inbuilt rules will identify and correct problems of such conflict. Thus, through proper management techniques and attention to the causes of conflict, it could be eliminated and organisational performance improved.

2. The Human Relations View. The human relations view dominated the conflict theory from the late 1940s through the mid 1970s. The human relations view argued that conflict was a natural occurrence in all groups and organisations. Since conflict was inevitable, management should accept the conflict. This theory says that conflict is avoidable by creating an environment of goodwill and trust. But still conflicts are bound to happen due to differences in opinions, faulty policies and procedures, lack of cooperation, allocation of resources which will lead to distortion and blockage in communication. Accordingly, management should always be concerned with avoiding conflict if possible and resolving it soon if possible, in the interests of the organisation and the individuals.

> *Management should be concerned with avoiding conflict if possible and resolving it as soon as possible, if otherwise.*

3. The Interactionist View. *Modern View Point.* While the human relations view accepted conflict, the interactionist approach encourages conflict. This view is based on the belief that conflict is not only a positive force in a group but is also necessary for a group to perform effectively. This approach encourages conflict. According to it if the group is harmonious, peaceful and cooperative, it is prone to become static and non responsive to the needs for change and innovation. Therefore, the group leader must allow some conflicts to happen in the group, so that the group may remain viable, self critical and creative.

> *The group leader must allow some conflicts to happen in the group, so that the group may remain viable, self critical and creative.*

However, conflicts must be kept under control to avoid their dysfunctional consequences. The major contribution of the interactionist approach is encouraging group leaders to maintain an ongoing minimum level of conflict, enough to keep the group viable, self critical and creative.

Thus, it becomes evident that to say conflict is all good or bad is in appropriate and naive. Whether a conflict is good or bad depends on the type of conflict.

Specifically, it is necessary to differentiate between functional and dysfunctional aspects of conflict.

FUNCTIONAL AND DYSFUNCTIONAL CONFLICT

The interactionist view does not propose that all conflicts are good. There are both positive and negative aspects of conflicts. **Boulding** recognises 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."

> *Functional conflicts support the goals of the group and improve its performance, whereas dysfunctional conflicts hinder group performance.*

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.

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 might otherwise 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 stress among 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 utilised by 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 with a 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. Once the 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 others 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.

DYSFUNCTIONAL CONFLICTS

The dysfunctional aspects of the conflicts can be visualised 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 create 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.

CONCLUSION

There should be an optimum level of conflict in the organisations that is very useful for the development of creativity, high problem solving behaviours and productivity.

Conflicts contained within reasonable limits, thus, serve, several useful purposes and can be functional for individuals, groups and to the institution. However, if conflict is allowed to develop beyond control, it could tend to become destructive, resulting in such averse situations as strikes, sabotage and other dysfunctional behaviour. There should be an optimum level of conflict that is very useful for the development of creativity, high problem solving behaviours and productivity. This optimum level is depicted in the following figure :
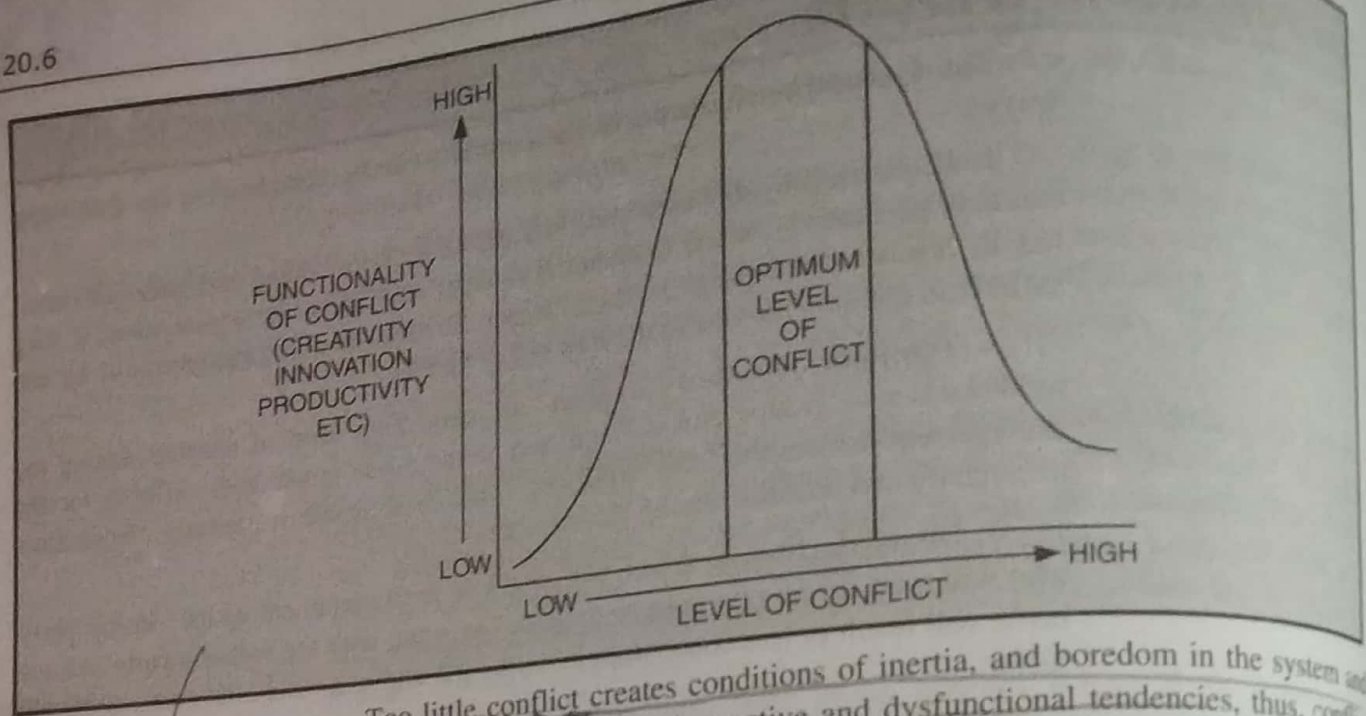
Too little conflict creates conditions of inertia, and boredom in the system and excessive conflict results in destructive and dysfunctional tendencies, thus, conflict has to be managed. Managers have to motivate the level of conflict in the system. If there is too little or no conflict at all, he may even have to induce some level of conflict to energise the system. As the level of conflict tends to go beyond the optimum level, the manager must act to resolve the conflict in a manner that will beneficial to the organisation.

LEVELS OF CONFLICT

Thomas and Schmidt have reported that the managers spend up to 20% of their time in dealing with conflict situations. Hence, it is very important that the managers should understand the types of conflict they have to deal with so that they can find out techniques to deal with the conflicts in each type of category. Conflicts can be classified as :

    (i) Individual level conflict

    (ii) Interpersonal conflict

    (iii) Group level conflict

    (iv) Organisation level conflict

(I) INTRA INDIVIDUAL CONFLICT

Intra-individual conflict is perhaps the most difficult type of conflict to analyse, since it is internal to the Person.

Intra individual conflict is perhaps, the most difficult type of conflict to analyse since it is internal to the person. All human beings are goal directed. Everyone has needs. These needs form the basis of human behaviour at work, at home, at play or every other activity which is pursued. Need satisfaction motivates the people and pushes them forward, whereas non-satisfaction of needs frustrates people and leads to behaviour that negatively affects job performance. In practical life, the organisational goals are always in direct conflict with the individual goals of employees causing them to be frustrated, alienated and threatened. Most of the people working in the organisations are like inert instruments, mere appendages of the production process. There is very little chance to be creative. As organisations grow, they tend to be even less responsive to the needs of the individuals.

incongruity model developed by **Chris Argyris** postulates that there is a lack of congruity between the needs of healthy individuals and the demands of the organisation.

The individual employee is caught in the web of his own making. He always faces a conflict within himself. The **need drive goal motivational cycle** does not occur.

The conflict in individuals is caused by the following factors :

Unacceptability
Uncertainty
Incomparability

Conflict arises within an individual whenever his drives and motives are blocked or he is confronted with compe-ting roles and goals and he is unable to make decisions.

1. Unacceptability

Every individual has a known acceptable alternative in terms of his own goals and perceptions. Since the alternative preferred by the organisation is not satisfactory to him, he is unable to accept it. Unacceptability is subjective because the alternative unacceptable to one may be acceptable to another individual. When the alternative is unacceptable to an individual, he will search for new alternatives. His search for acceptable alternative continues. But sometimes, repeated failure to discover acceptable alternatives leads to a redefinition of acceptable.

2. Incomparability

The individual knows the probability distribution of the alternatives but he is not able to take decision because the outcomes are incomparable. When the results are not comparable, no decision could be taken. Similarly, an individual is also unable to make proper comparison of alternatives. Comparison requires clarity, technique of comparison including assigning weights to different components, rationality in attitude and behaviour and the competence to perform the task. The procedure of comparison depends also on the clarity and decisiveness of the individual regarding the minimum standard of achievement. If the individual does not have much clarity as to the expectancy, he will not be able to make comparison. The state of incomparability causes lot of tension and conflict to the individual.

3. Uncertainty

Individuals are uncertain about the environments within and outside the organisations. If the environment could be properly depicted, the behaviour of the people regarding acceptability of the alternative and efficacy of the alternative could be ascertained with certainty. In a state of uncertainty, the individual feels frustrated which is ultimately reflected in conflict.

Within an individual there are usually a number of competing goals and roles. Thus, an individual experiences three types of conflict within himself :

    (a) Frustration

    (b) Goal conflict and

    (c) Role conflict

Frustration is the highest level of dissatisfaction which in turn creates conflict in the individual.

    (a) **Frustration.** When an individual is unable to do what he wants to do, he becomes frustrated. Frustration is the highest level of dissatisfaction which, in turn, generates conflict in the individual. This is generally caused when the motivated drives of an individual are blocked before he reaches his goal. These blocks may be physical or mental/social-psychological. Frustration, in turn, leads to defense mechanism.

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The defensive mechanism or the outcome or the reaction of frustration has broadly been classified under four heads :

(i) Aggression

(ii) Withdrawal

(iii) Fixation and

(iv) Compromise.

For example, an individual wants to enter a room through the door, which is locked. Door is the physical block. In spite of his best efforts, if he cannot open the door, he will resort to aggression i.e. kicking the door. Another alternative can be with drawing from the situation i.e. the door. If that does not work, then he can resort to fixation i.e. renewed efforts to open the door. Finally, he can compromise i.e.. If he cannot enter the room through the door, then try through the window i.e. choosing alternate course of action to whichever alternative he chooses there will be conflict owing to frustration.

(b) **Goal Conflict.** A common source of conflict for an individual in the organisation is the existence of two or more competing goals. This type of conflict has both positive and negative features. Goal conflict occurs when two or more motives block each other. When an individual is unable to take decision about the goal to be achieved either due to positive and negative features existing in the goal or the existence of two or more competing goals, it causes a lot of conflict in the individual. In this context three types of goal conflict have been identified. These are :

> *Goal conflict occurs when two or more motives block each other.*

(i) Approach—Approach conflict

(ii) Approach—Avoidance conflict
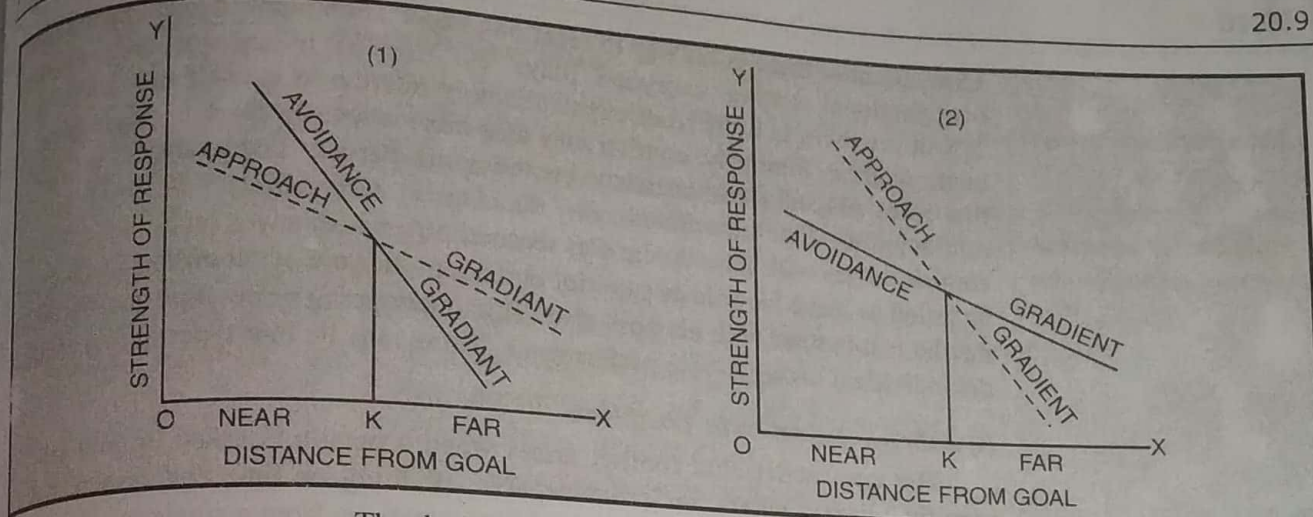
(iii) Avoidance—Avoidance conflict

(I) APPROACH-APPROACH CONFLICT

Approach-Approach conflict is a situation which arises when an individual approaches two or more equally attractive but mutually exclusive goals. He cannot make a choice as to which one is better of the two e.g. a person has to choose between accepting a promotion in the present organisation and taking a desirable job with another organisation. This type of conflict has least impact on the organisational behaviour.

Approach-Approach conflict could be solved with the help of **Leon Festinger's** well known theory of **"Cognitive Dissonance"**. Dissonance means psychological discomfort or conflict. The individual may reduce dissonance by cognition of a job which is decidedly better than the other. He can manipulate the information by rationalising the particular decision he takes, seeking more favourable information about the choice made and avoiding the information causing dissonance.

(II) APPROACH-AVOIDANCE CONFLICT

Approach-Avoidance conflict is a situation in which a single goal has both positive as well as negative characteristics. He is motivated to approach the goal because of the positive characteristics but simultaneously compelled to avoid because of its negative characteristics. For example, a person may be offered a promotion carrying much higher pay and status, but away from his home town. In this approach the conflict is at the maximum when the approach and avoidance curve meet each other as sh...

Figure (1): Y-axis: STRENGTH OF RESPONSE; X-axis: DISTANCE FROM GOAL (NEAR — K — FAR). Curves labelled APPROACH, AVOIDANCE, GRADIANT GRADIANT.

Figure (2): Y-axis: STRENGTH OF RESPONSE; X-axis: DISTANCE FROM GOAL (NEAR — K — FAR). Curves labelled APPROACH, AVOIDANCE, GRADIENT GRADIENT.

The decision could be taken to resolve the conflict by looking at the gradients of avoidance and approach elements. If the gradient of any one of them is steeper beyond the equilibrium point K, it means the other one will be over it. Hence the goal is accepted because the approach having positive elements is less steep and is above the avoidance gradiant having negative element. In fig. (2) the goal is avoided because beyond equilibrium the gradiant of approach is steeper than avoidance. In other words, the avoidance overweighs approach, hence, the goal is rejected.

This type of goal conflict is very relevant for organisational behaviour.

(III) AVOIDANCE-AVOIDANCE APPROACH

Avoidance-Avoidance conflict arises when an individual has to choose between two alternatives each with negative aspects. Both the alternatives are equally unattractive. For example, a person may dislike his present job but the alternative of resigning and looking for another job may be equally unattractive. Ordinarily if both the goals are unattractive it is comparatively easier to resolve conflict by avoiding both of them. But, in certain situations, it may not be possible to avoid both the goals. In such a situation, the goal having comparatively lesser negative element may be retained and the other abandoned. Avoidance- Avoidance is not an easy task though both have negative elements.

In the above conflict situations, the individual will feel dissatisfied with the organisation as his expectations are not met by the organisation. This will lead to incongruence between individual goals and those of the organisation. While Approach- Approach conflict may be mildly distressing for the individuals, other goal conflicts may be quite dysfunctional for both the organisation as well as its individual members. The general approach for the management should be to resolve goal conflicts by building compatibility not conflict between personal and organisational goals.

(c) ROLE CONFLICT

Every person plays a number of roles in social and organisational situations. Although all the roles which he brings into the organisation are relevant to his behaviour, his organisational role is most important in the study of organisational behaviour. Every individual in the organisation is expected to behave in a particular manner while performing a specific role. When the expected role is different or opposite from the behaviour anticipated by the individual in that role, role conflict

arises because there is no way to meet one expectation without rejecting the other. In organisational setting everyone plays the role of a superior and subordinate. Whenever there is a different expectations in relation to himself and others, conflict ought to arise. Similarly, conflict may also arise whenever there is overlapping of the two roles played simultaneously by the same person. For example, a superior is reprimanding his subordinate for the lapses and during this course his boss communicates with him. As he was so surcharged with anger on his subordinate that he failed to leave his role as superior and adopt the role of subordinate with the result that he lost temper with his boss also. This overlapping more often causes conflict to the individual owing to role performance. There may be four types of role conflicts.

(i) Intrasender role conflict

The intrasender role conflict arises when a person is asked to do a job within specified limits, which he is not capable of doing or time and resources are not sufficient to do the job. In this case, the expectations from a single member of a role are incompatible.

(ii) Intersender role conflict

In intersender role conflict, the expectations sent from one sender may be in conflict with those from one or more other senders.

(iii) Self-role conflict

Self role conflict occurs when a person is asked to do a job which is incompatible with his own value system. For example a manager may be asked to get a job done by bribing some public officials but his value system and conscience may not permit him to do so.

(iv) Inter role conflict

Inter role conflict arises when an individual occupies multiple and divergent roles simultaneously and the expectations associated with these different roles are incompatible.

Every person holding a particular position in the organisation is expected to behave in a particular manner. This is known as the role expectation from that person. When the role expectations are not properly communicated to the individuals, it may result in- (a) role ambiguity, (b) role conflict and (c) role overload.

(a) Role Ambiguity

If the expectations associated with a role are unclear or unambiguously defined, the individual will face difficulties in performing that role. The role ambiguity can be very stressful for the individuals. Role ambiguity can arise in two situations, one when the duties of the subordinate are not properly communicated by the manager, secondly, when the subordinate has not properly understood the boss. In both these cases, subordinates are assigned roles without adequate preparation for those roles.

(b) Role Conflict

Role conflict arises when the role expectations are understood, but due to one reason or the other, they cannot be complied with. The person in this case, is not able to respond to the expectations of other persons. Role conflict is another source of potential tension.

(c) Role Overload

Role overload arises when too many role expectations are communicated to a person at a given time.

Managers may create overload for their subordinates when they rely on one way communication. When valuable feedback from the subordinates is not there, the managers are not in a position to learn when or why a subordinate is experiencing stress.

Role conflicts depend on :

(i) awareness of role conflict

(ii) acceptance of conflicting job pressures

(iii) ability to tolerate stress

(iv) general personality make up

Role conflict can create tensions among individuals and affect their attitudes and behaviours adversely. It can be resolved apart from the factors enumerated above by an individual by playing the role according to conviction and the norms of justice and fair play. He will play the role in accordance with standardised and objective pattern of expectation in relation to himself and by others.

(II) INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT

Interpersonal conflict involves conflict between two or more individuals and is probably the most common and most recognised conflict. All conflicts are basically interpersonal conflicts because most of the conflicts involve conflict between a person in one organisation or a group and another person in other organisation or a group. Every individual has a separate acceptable alternative course of action and different individuals prefer different alternatives. The organisation itself creates situations in which two individuals are placed in conflict situations. This may involve conflict, for example, between two managers who are competing for limited capital and manpower resources. Another type of interpersonal conflict can relate to disagreement over goals and objectives of the organisation. These conflicts are highlighted when they are based upon opinions rather than facts. Opinions are highly personal and subjective and may lead to criticism and disagreements. These conflicts are often the result of personality clashes.

> *Interpersonal conflict involves conflict between two or more individuals and is the most common and most recognised conflict.*

According to **Whetten and Cameron** there are four sources of interpersonal conflict.

(1) Personal Differences

Personal differences can be a major source of conflict between individuals. Individual differ because of one's upbringing, cultural and family traditions, family background, education experience and values.

(2) Information Deficiency

Lack of information can be another source of interpersonal conflict. This type of conflict often results from communication breakdown in the organisation.

(3) Role Incompatibility

Another source of interpersonal conflict can be role in compatibility. In today's inter functional organisations, many managers have functions and tasks that are interdependent and the individual roles of these managers may be incompatible.

(4) Environment Stress

The interpersonal conflict can also be due to environmental stress. Stress from environment arises because of scarce or shrinking resources, downsizing, competitive pressures and high degree of uncertainty.

Interpersonal conflicts have a tendency to resolve themselves because the conflicting parties are not in a position to remain tense for a very long time. Time is the healing factor for these conflicts. In case the inter personal conflicts are of persisting nature it can be resolved through counselling, effective communication, win win negotiation and transactional analysis. Management must analyse the reasons for conflict and resolve to create an atmosphere of openness and mutual trust in the organisation.

(III) GROUP LEVEL CONFLICT

A group consists of two or more persons who are in interaction with each other, have a well defined structure of role and status relations and have a system of values and norms of behaviour for the smooth working of the group. Groups not only affect the behaviour of their members, rather they have impact on other groups and the organisation as a whole. In this process of interaction, two types of conflict arises (A) Intra group and (B) Inter group.

(A) Intra Group Conflict

Intra group conflict arises when differences crop up between the members of the group. The individual may want to remain in the group for social needs but may disagree with the group methods. Intra-group conflict may arise in three ways.

(i) When the group faces a new problem

(ii) When new values are imported from the social environment into the group and

(iii) When a person's extra group role comes into conflict with his intra group role.

Intra group conflict is like the interpersonal conflict with the difference that the persons involved in the conflict episode belong to a common group. The causes are similar to those of interpersonal conflicts.

(B) Inter Group Conflict

Conflicts between different groups in the organisation are known as intergroup conflicts. Inter-group conflict may also be stated in terms of organisational conflict. Causes of intergroup conflict may be summarised under four heads :

(i) Absence of joint decision making

(ii) Difference in goals

(iii) Difference in perception and

(iv) Difference in goals as well as perception.

(i) Absence of joint decision making. Organisation is comprising of different groups. Each group puts its urgency for having maximum share in the limited resources and press for the acceptance of its own time schedule for the performance of a task. If the wishes of a group in respect of resources and time schedule are accepted, justice cannot be done to other groups, which will ultimately lead to organisational ineffectiveness. Joint decision making is the only solution to resolve the conflict. The conflicting parties may sit together and discuss their own needs in the overall organisational perspective.

(ii) Difference in goals. Difference in goals arise due to the following reasons :

(a) Factors which affect the commonality within the organisation such as heterogeneity in groups

(b) Factors that affect the clarity and consistency of reward structure and

(c) Factors which affect comparability of reward structure.

(iii) Difference in Perception. Differences in perception causing intergroup conflict arises due to :

(a) members having different sources of information

(b) different techniques of processing the information

(c) different time horizons and

(d) difference in goals.

In some situations intergroup conflict may arise to difference in goals as well as perception both.

Structurally, organisational conflict could be divided under four heads :

(a) Hierarchical Conflict. The hierarchical conflict is that conflict which exists among different levels of organisation. For example, the middle level management may conflict with the top or lower level management.

(b) Functional Conflict. When conflict exists between various functional departments of the organisation, it is called functional conflict. For example, the production department may be in conflict with the marketing department.

(c) Line-Staff Conflict. Line Staff Conflict may be stated as the conflict between members of line and members of staff. Since the members of staff do not have any authority over the persons in line conflict is generated.

(d) Formal-Informal Conflict. When the Conflict exists between the formal and informal organisations, it is known as formal-informal conflict.

Organisational conflicts though completely not avoidable could be prevented and settled to effect organisational effectiveness.

(IV) ORGANISATION-LEVEL CONFLICT

All the conflicts discussed in the preceding discussion relate to conflicts within the organisational settings. Inter organisational level conflict occurs between organisations which are in some way or the other dependent upon each other. Conflicts at individual level, group level or inter group level are all inherent in the organisation level conflict. The organisation level conflict can be between the buyer and seller organisation, between union and organisations employing the members, between government agencies that regulate certain organisations and the organisations that are affected by them. Managers must try to live with this type of conflict. If the conflict is properly handled it can be constructive in achieving the results. It can act as a stimulus it may be a challenge and motivational force to keep the organisation moving.

CAUSES OF CONFLICT

The various types of conflicts explained earlier, explain the causes of conflict. These causes can be restructured and placed into three distinct categories. These categories deal with the following aspects :

1. Communicational Aspect of Conflict. Lack of proper communication can be a cause of conflict. If due to the poor communication, partial or misunderstood

information is passed from the sender to the receiver of communication, it can make a difference between the success and failure of the task. For such failure, it will be a difference between the sender very difficult to fix the responsibility and it will cause conflict between the sender and the receiver of the information. The problems of communication process may be due to :

(i) **Too much or too little communication** which means that information is passed through many levels or through many members. The amount of information is functional upto a point, after that it becomes a source of conflict.

(ii) **Filtering of communication.** The amount of information is passed through many levels or through many members. The amount of information is functional upto a point, after that it becomes a source of conflict.

(iii) **Semantic problems** arise due to differences in background, training, selection perception and inadequate information about others.

(iv) **Problem of noise.**

All these problems may tend to stimulate misunderstanding among members, which if not resolved will result in conflict. Accordingly, adequate, complete and correctly understood communication is very important in orderly completion of tasks, thus, reducing the chances of conflict.

2. Behavioural Aspect of Conflict. The behavioural aspect of conflict arises out of human thoughts and feelings, emotions and attitudes values and perceptions and personality traits. Some of the important causes of this aspect of conflict are :

(i) **Some people's values** or perceptions of situations are particularly likely to generate conflict with others.

(ii) This conflict may also be based on personal biases regarding religion, race or sex.

(iii) Some of these conflicts are not about issues but about persons. Some families carry on enmity for generations.

(iv) This conflict may also arise due to differing view points about various issues.

(v) **The widening gap** between 'haves' and 'have nots' also causes considerable conflict, because the unrealised expectations of under privileged causes frustration in their mind which leads to conflict.

(vi) **From an organisational point of view,** there is conflict between the goals of the formal organisations and the psychological needs of the individual, because both of these are inconsistent with each other.

3. Structural Aspect of Conflict. These conflicts arise due to the structural design of the organisations. Some of these factors are :

(i) **The larger the size** of the organisation, more will be the chances of conflict.

(ii) **One of the frequently** mentioned and continuous source of conflict is the distinction between line and staff units within the organisation.

(iii) **Participation of the subordinates** in the decision making process is a cause of conflict. If subordinates are not allowed to participate, they will show resentment, which will cause conflict. On the other hand, if greater participation opportunities are provided to the subordinates, the level of conflict will be even higher, because participation will create awareness about the individual differences. This conflict is further enhanced when individuals try to enforce their view points on others.

(iv) **Role ambiguity** is also a cause of conflict. When the role of an individual and other people who depend on his activities, is not clearly defined, it will cause conflict especially between this individual and other people who depend on his activities.

(v) **The primary causes** of inter group problems and conflicts are poorly designed work flow structure and poorly planned coordination requirements specially where tasks are interdependent.

(vi) **Scarcity of resources** like capital, facilities, staff assistance etc. causes conflict among the people and units who must share these and who have to compete for them. The scarcity may bring conflict among groups who are otherwise peaceful at the time of abundance.
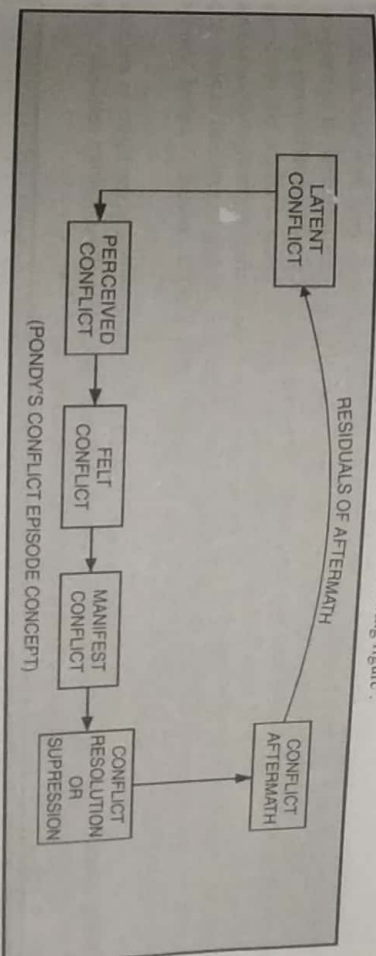
STAGES IN CONFLICT

In 1967, Pondy developed a process model of conflict which is very useful in understanding how conflict starts and what stages it goes through. Pondy identifies five stages in what he calls a "conflict episode".

1. Latent conflict
2. Perceived conflict
3. Felt conflict
4. Manifest conflict
5. Conflict aftermath.

This model is portrayed in the following figure :

RESIDUALS OF AFTERMATH

LATENT CONFLICT → PERCEIVED CONFLICT → FELT CONFLICT → MANIFEST CONFLICT → CONFLICT RESOLUTION OR SUPPRESSION → CONFLICT AFTERMATH

(PONDY'S CONFLICT EPISODE CONCEPT)

Let us discuss these stages one by one :

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
(iii) Divergence of goals
(iv) Role conflict

2. Perceived Conflict. Conflicts may sometimes arise even if no conditions of latent conflict exist. This is the 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 cognised. 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 personalisation 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 personalisation 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 personalised when the whole personality of the individual is involved in the relationship. Hostile feelings are most common in the intimate relations that characterise 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, withdrawl 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 notives towards violence may remain but they tend to be expressed in less violent form.

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 and exercised in any given situation.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

There may be two approaches for managing the organisational conflict (i) Preventive measures and (ii) Curative measures. In the preventive measures, the management tries to create a situation or environment where dysfunctional aspects of conflicts do not take place. As in most of the cases, conflict is destructive in nature, it should be resolved as soon as possible after it has developed, but all efforts should be made to prevent it from developing. Both these measures are explained as follows :

A. Preventive Measures

Some of the preventive measures which the management can take to manage the organisational conflicts are :

1. Establishing Common Goals. The major reason for the development of conflict is the incompatible goals. This is particularly true in case of conflict among

> Conflict is destructive in nature and it should be resolved as soon as possible after it has developed, but all efforts should be made to prevent it from developing.

groups and between individuals and organisation. The basic strategy of reducing the conflict should be to find common goals upon which groups can agree and to reestablish valid communication between the groups. The mutual dependence of groups can be brought through the super ordinate goals because there are the goals which are of high value to the group. Super ordinate goals can also be reduced through the use of incentive systems designed to reward the activities that benefit the larger system, as opposed to those which are primarily in the interest of subunits.

2. Reduction in Interdependence. The main reason for inter- group conflict is interdependence among them e.g. line and staff managers. As such, less the such interdependence cannot be altogether avoided. However, instead of separating the units organisationally, they can be separated physically. The physical separation, is not a permanent mer'sure of managing conflict.

3. Reduction in Shared Resources. Another reason of inter group conflict is sharing of the scarce resources by the groups. The management of conflict suggests reducing the sharing. One technique for this can be increasing the resources, so that each unit is independent in using them. But as the resources are scarce, they cannot always be increased. Thus, the best possible alternative is optimum allocation of the scarce resources.

4. Trust and Communication. The greater the trust among the members of the unit, the more open and honest the communication will be. Individuals and groups should be encouraged to communicate openly with each other, so that misunderstandings can be removed and they are in a position to understand the problems of each other when necessary.

5. Coordination. After communication, the next step should be proper coordination. Properly coordinated activities reduce the conflict. Wherever there are problems in coordination, a special liaison office should be established to deal with these problems.

6. Exchange of Personnel. Another method of reducing and managing conflict is that personnel of conflicting groups may be exchanged for a specified period. Exchange of people is very similar to role reversal. It is aimed at greater understanding between people by forcing each to present and defend the other's position.

7. Use of Superior Authority. If conflict cannot be resolved by two organisational members or by two groups, it may be referred to a common superior, who will resolve the conflict by giving a decision. Such a decision may not necessarily bring agreement, but it will usually be accepted because of the recognised superior authority of high ranking official.
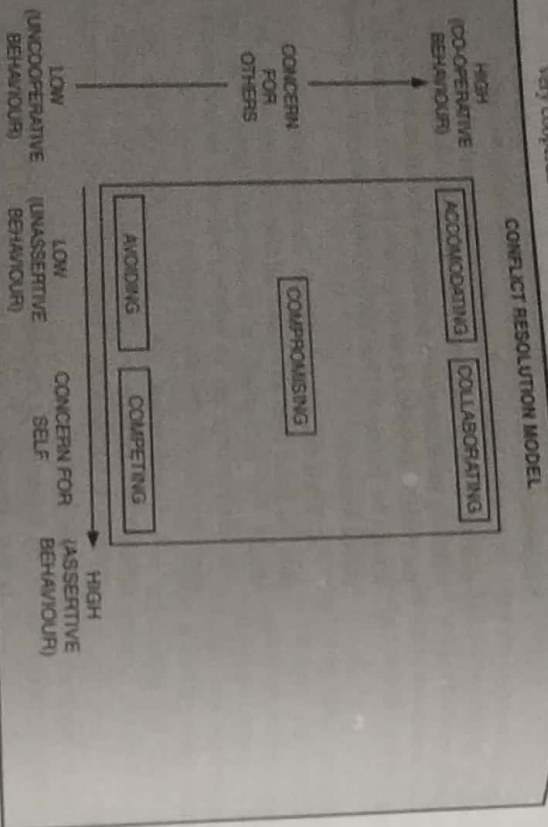
8. Reorganisation of Groups. A manager can prevent the occurrence of many conflicts by reorganisation the groups. People who have got something in common will be placed in one group. Because of something common interest and objective, to see things in the same perspective, to have common interest and objective, to approach problems in much the same way. The behaviour of such group is more predictable and it is easy for the manager to avoid conflicts.

Management of Conflict

B. Curative Measures or Resolving Behavioural Conflict

The curative measures include the resolution of conflicts when they take place and become dysfunctional in the organisation. Two questions are involved in this : (i) What are the different conflict resolution modes and (ii) how can the manager know which type of conflict resolution style should be adopted under what kinds of circumstances ? Thomas has offered a contingency approach to resolving conflicts which we will illustrate now.

Example : If two groups or parties X and Y experience conflict, each could be more concerned about their own self or they could experience more concern for the other. When concern for the self is very low, they could be very unassertive and if concern for the self is high, they could be very assertive. If their concern for the other is low they would tend to be uncooperative, and if it is high, they would be very cooperative. This could be depicted with the help of the following figure :

CONFLICT RESOLUTION MODEL

Management of Conflict

4. **Accommodating.** If X is highly concerned about the other but not so much about himself, then X is cooperative but very unassertive about the other's concerns, then he will be eager to give into Y and please Y. To ensure that Y's concerns are satisfied, X would be very accommodating and then, try to resolve conflict through a policy of appeasement.

5. **Compromise.** If X has medium level of concern both for himself and the other, then he would take a compromising stance with the attitude of "give and take". After going through all the above models, the question arises as to whether their is one best mode for conflict resolution ? All five modes are suitable for different situations and each has its own advantages and disadvantages. But we have to understand which mode works best in what kind of a situation, keeping in view its drawbacks, so that we can learn to be more flexible in the use of our conflict handling styles to suit the different types of conflictful situations we find ourselves in.

The following points clarify the most important situations under which each mode can be used :

(i) **Competing.** A competing style is high on assertiveness and low on cooperativeness. This style is power oriented and approaches conflict in terms of a "WIN-LOSE" strategy. On the negative side, a competitor may suppress, intimidate or coerce other parties into conflict. On the positive side, a competing style may be necessary when a quick, decisive action is required or when important but unpopular courses of action may be taken. In addition, competing may be required when "you know you are right" is an issue.

> *Competing Style is power orientation and approaches conflict in terms of a WIN-LOSE Strategy.*

Thus, while the competing mode is useful in certain situations, people have to be careful not to surround themselves with "Yes Man" and not to foster ignorance and duplicity in the system. People low on this mode can learn to use their power more and enhance their own as well as their organisation's effectiveness.

(ii) **Accommodating.** The accommodating style is low in assertiveness and high in cooperativeness. A person who uses an accommodating style, as is the primary approach to conflict management, may be showing too little concern for personal goals. Such a lack of concern may lead to lack of influence and recognition. It means that conflicts are resolved without each party to the conflict preceding his or her view in a forceful and meaningful way.

> *Accommodating person shows little concern for personal goals.*

The accommodating style has its uses. It is useful when :

(a) a conflict issue is more important to the other person ;
(b) another style's disadvantages outweigh those of the accommodating style ;
(c) maintaining harmony is important ;
(d) It is advantageous to allow the other person the experience of winning and lastly when :
(e) an accommodating style on an issue may make the other person more receptive on another more important issue. We can say that there is an element of self sacrifice in this mode.

(iii) **Compromising.** To some people, the word compromise suggests weakness and lack of commitment to a position. A compromiser may be thought of as a person who puts expediency above principle or who seeks short term solutions at the

> *A compromising style results in each conflict participant sharing in some degree of winning and losing.*

(left column continued)

HIGH
(CO-OPERATIVE BEHAVIOUR)

ACCOMODATING | COLLABORATING

CONCERN FOR OTHERS

COMPROMISING

AVOIDING | COMPETING

LOW
(UNCOOPERATIVE BEHAVIOUR)

LOW
(UNASSERTIVE BEHAVIOUR)

CONCERN FOR SELF

HIGH
(ASSERTIVE BEHAVIOUR)

1. **Avoidance.** If, in a conflicting situation, party X is concerned neither about himself nor the other, X is likely to avoid facing or handling the conflict. When the situation is, then, ignored or neglected, then Y might just get the better of X by taking advantage of X's avoidance behaviour.

2. **Competing.** If on the other hand, X has very high concern for himself, but very low concern for the other, then X will take a very high competitive stance and would approach the conflict situation from "I win-you lose" stance. The competitive mode of handling the conflict will then resolve who wins and who loses in the situation.

3. **Collaboration.** If X has concern both for the self and for the other, then X would approach the conflict situation in a collaborative mode with a desire to solve whatever problem exists, in a way that would benefit both the parties.

A "win-win" stance will be taken in such a case and the resolution of conflict will result in satisfying experience for both the parties.

expense of long term objectives. A compromising style results in each conflict participant sharing in some degree of winning and losing.

It is essential, however, to recognise the potential value of compromise. Compromise is a common and practical approach to conflict management because if often fits the realities of organisational life. This 'fit' occurs when a conflict is not important enough to either party to warrant the time and psychological investment in one of the more assertive modes of handling a situation. In addition, compromise may be the only practical way of handling a situation, in which two equally strong and persuasive parties attempt to work out a solution.

Compromise is an expedient mode to settle complex issues in the short run till a more thorough and permanent solution to the problem can be found. This is particularly true, when solutions have to be arrived at under extreme time pressures. It can also be used as a backup mode when both collaboration and competition fail to work effectively. At first glance, an avoiding style may appear to have no value as

(iv) Avoiding. At first glance, an avoiding style may reflect a failure to address a mode of managing conflict. An avoiding style may also exhibit detachment from the conflict and a readiness important issues and a tendency to exhibit detachment from the conflict and a readiness position. An avoider may also exhibit detachment from the conflict and a readiness to comply or conform, based on indifference. A-voiding is, thus, advisable in the following situations:

> *An avoider exhibits detachment from the conflict and a readiness to comply or conform, based on indifference.*

(i) When you desire that people should cool down, so that they regain their composure and perspective, after which, the tension may be handled more productively.

(ii) When more information is needed to make a good decision.

(iii) When someone else can resolve the conflict more effectively.

(iv) When the issue which provokes the conflicts is symptomatic of another more basic underlying matter and attempting to resolve the surface issue will not help the situation.

(v) **Collaborating.** Collaborating involves an attempt to work with the other person to find solutions that would be satisfying to both parties. The collaborating style is high on both cooperation and assertion. It is possible only if the parties to a conflict recast it as a problem solving situation. A problem solving approach requires the following conditions:

> *Collaborating style is high on both coopera-tion and assertion.*

(i) There is an attempt to depersonalise the conflict. That is, the parties to the conflict channel their energies in solving the problem rather than defeating each other.

(ii) The goals, opinions, attitudes and feelings of all parties are accepted as legitimate concerns, and all parties play a constructive role.

(iii) The parties realise that a conflict issue can make a constructive contribution to the quality of human relationships if the issue is worked through in a supporting and trusting climate in which opinions and differences are freely aired.

The various approaches of conflict management suggest that management can take a variety of actions depending on the situations, parties to conflicts, issues to conflicts and the organisational resources available. All the five conflict modes are useful under different situations and there are advantages and disadvantages. On the basis of conflict handling behaviours, we can take a contingency approach to handling conflict situations.

A GENERAL APPROACH IN MINIMISING AND RESOLVING CONFLICT

A good general approach in minimising and resolving conflicts consists of the following three steps:

1. Establish and maintain a low conflict, low stress climate, with cooperation as the norm.

2. Isolate each significant conflict to a single, specific task issue or family of issues. Don't accept personality clashes but insist that the protagonists focus on a concrete issue and its rational elements.

3. Help the protagonists apply a rational problem solving model or procedure to the issue, go for a workable compromise.

STIMULATING CONFLICT

It has been pointed out earlier that under certain circumstances, conflict is necessary and desirable in order to create changes and challenges within the organisation. In such situations, management would evolve a policy of conflict stimulation so that it encourages involvement and innovation. Some of the specific techniques workout during conflict as suggested by S.P. Robbins are:

1. **Appoint Managers who Support Change.** Some highly authoritative managers are very conservative in their work out and tend to be of opposing viewpoints. Accordingly, change oriented managers should be appointed and placed in such positions which encourage innovation and change in Status Quo.

2. **Encourage Competition.** Competition if managed properly can enhance conflict which would be beneficial to the organisation. Such competition can be created by tying incentives to performance, recognition of efforts and status enhancement. Such competition would result in new ideas regarding improving productivity.

> *A policy of conflict stimulation encourages involvement and inno-vation.*

3. **Manipulate Scarcity.** Let the individuals and groups compete for scarce resources. This would cause conflict and make the individuals and groups do their best in order to fully utilise such resources.

4. **Play on Status Differences.** Sometimes, ignoring the senior staff members and giving visible responsibilities to junior staff members can cause a conflict requiring senior members to work harder to prove that they are better than the junior staff members.

Key Points

- Conflict has considerable influence on behaviour, performance and satisfaction of employees.
- Conflict is associated with situations that involve contradictory or irreconcilable interest between two opposing groups.
- Conflict contained within reasonable limits serves useful purposes and can be functional for individuals, groups and to the institution. However, if conflict is allowed to develop beyond control, it could tend to become destructive resulting in dysfunctional behaviour.
- There should be an optimal level of conflict that is very useful for the development of creativity, high problem solving behaviours and productivity.
- Conflict can be classified as intra-individual conflict, inter-personal conflict, group level conflict and organisational level conflict.