

Question No. 4 Discuss the nature and types of conflict that can occur in an Organization. As a manager, how would you manage conflict in your Organization?

Solution: NATURE AND TYPES OF CONFLICTS

Over the years conflicts have acquired divergent meanings. Certain commodities can be identified there: the conflicting parties must perceive it; that is, it is a perception issue. Another commonality is the opposition or incompatibility and some form of interaction. Conflict is disagreement in a social situation over issues of substance or whenever interpersonal emotions create frictions between individuals or groups. Issues of substance essentially mean any fundamental disagreement over ends or goals to be pursued and the means for their accomplishment. Emotional conflict involves interpersonal difficulties that arise over feelings of anger, mistrust, dislike, fear, resentment etc. Robbins defines conflict “as a process that begins when one party perceives that another party has negatively affected or is about to negatively affect, something that the first party cares about”. The definition encompasses a wide range of conflicts that people experience in organisations. There is increasing evidence that not all conflicts are bad for performance and productivity. Some conflicts do support the goals of the group and improve the group’s performance. These have been labelled functional constructive forms of conflict. The conflicts that decrease and obstruct group performance are known as dysfunctional or destructive forms of conflict. Look at following Figure which shows functional and dysfunctional conflict.

To gain a perspective on that differentiates a functional conflict from a dysfunctional one, we need to understand the type of conflict. In organisations, there are three types of conflict:

- 1) Task Conflict
- 2) Relationship Conflict
- 3) Process Conflict

Task Conflict relates to the content and goals of the work: relationship conflict focuses on interpersonal relationships and process conflict relates to how does the work get done. Research shows that relationship conflicts are almost always dysfunctional. The dysfunctionality is

because the friction and interpersonal hostilities inherent in the relationship conflicts which increase ego clashes and decrease mutual understanding, thereby blocking the completion of jobs. The functionality of low levels of process conflict come about when task roles are clear and adequate time to complete the task is given; a low-to-moderate level of task conflict consistently demonstrates a positive effect on group performance because it stimulates discussion of ideas that help groups perform better.

MANAGEMENT OF CONFLICT

One must know when to resolve conflict and when to stimulate it if one is to avoid its potentially disruptive effects. When a potentially harmful conflict situation exists a manager needs to engage in conflict resolution. Conflict should be resolved when its focus is on the group's internal goals rather than on organisational goals. If the conflict becomes excessive or destructive the manager needs to adapt a strategy to reduce or resolve it. Managers should first attempt to determine the source of the conflict. If the source of destructive conflict is a particular person or two, it might be appropriate to alter the membership of one or both groups. If it is due to differences in goals, perceptions of the difficulty of goal attainment or the importance of the goals to the conflicting parties, then the manager can attempt to move the conflicting parties into one of the five types of reactions (i.e. avoidance, accommodation, competition, collaboration and compromise), depending on the nature of the conflicting parties. To foster collaboration, it might be appropriate to try to help people see that their goals are really not as different as they seem to be. The manager can help groups view their goals as part of a super ordinate goal to which the goals of both conflicting parties can contribute. If the goals are very incompatible, the manager may need to develop ways to help the conflicting parties avoid each other. Similarly, accommodation, competition or compromise might be appropriate for the conflicting parties. Let us now briefly examine the various modes through which conflict can be handled so as to result in optimal unit performance. It has been pointed out that when the conflict level is too low, the group performance is also likely to be low. A perceptive manager may recognize that if he were to stimulate conflict it

may enhance performance. Following a brief discussion on stimulating functional conflict is presented:

Stimulating Functional Conflict

The tendency to avoid conflict is not always productive and there are times when there is a need to stimulate conflict. Research studies concur with the idea of functional conflict. The following are some of the findings of multiple studies: Situations where conflict is needed for enhanced performance: The organisation is filled with “yes” men Employees are afraid to admit ignorance Compromise is emphasized in decision-making Managers stress on harmony and peace Popularity is given more importance than technical competence People show great resistance to change There is unusually low rate of employee turnover

Once the need for conflict has been identified one may adopt one or more of the following techniques: Manipulate Communication Channels Deviate messages from traditional channels Suppress information Transmit too much information Transmit ambiguous or threatening information Organisational Restructure (Redefine jobs/tasks, reform units/activities Increase a unit's size

Increase specialisation/standardisation

Include, exclude or transfer members

Increase interdependence between units Alter Behaviour Patterns

Attempt to change personality characteristics Create role conflict

Develop role incongruence.