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Learning objective:-

❖ Conflict in Groups

- Substantive Conflict

- Procedural Conflict

- Affective Conflict

❖ Constructive and Destructive Conflict

❖ The conflict process

❖ Sources of conflict

❖ Conflict management

❖ Group Cohesion

Conflict in groups

Conflict is unavoidable in an effective group. Rarely do conscientious members work in groups for any length of time without expressing differences and disagreeing. Yet despite the inevitability of conflict, many of us go out of our way to avoid or suppress it.

One of the myths about effective groups is "that they are characterized by chumminess. Many effective teams look more like battlegrounds, it turns out. . . . Teams with vastly competent members embrace conflict as the price of synergy and set good idea against good idea to arrive at the best idea." The word conflict is frequently associated with quarreling, fighting, anger, and hostility. While these elements may be present in a group situation, conflict does not have to involve the expression of negative emotions. We define conflict as the disagreement and disharmony that occurs in groups when differences are expressed regarding ideas, methods, and/or members. When treated as an expression of legitimate differences, conflict "can be used as the spur to find the wider solution, the solution that will meet the mutual interest of the parties involved in it."

Putnam has classified the sources of conflict as substantive, procedural, and affective.

- **Substantive Conflict**:-
  Substantive conflict is disagreement over members' ideas and group issues. For example, when members of a student government council argue whether or not student activities fees should be raised, their conflict is substantive. Such conflict is directly related to working toward the group's goal of serving students' co-curricular needs.

- **Procedural Conflict**:-
  Procedural conflict is disagreement among group members about the methods or process the group should follow in its attempt to accomplish a goal. Whereas some group members may want to begin a discussion by suggesting solutions to a problem, others may want to start by gathering and discussing information. Some members may believe that a decision should be made by secret ballot while others may want a show of hands.

- **Affective Conflict**:-
  Affective conflict centers around the personalities, communication styles, and emotions of group members. Its causes are numerous. Affective conflict may occur when a member does not feel valued or is threatened by the group. Affective conflict also occurs when members believe that their ideas are not judged fairly or when group members are struggling for power. Affective conflict is more difficult to resolve because it involves

people's feelings and the way members relate to one another. Frequently when disagreement occurs in groups, both substantive and affective types of conflict are present. For example, Dee believes student fees should be raised in order to fund more campus activities. Charles disagrees and suggests that the existing funds should be used more efficiently rather than placing a larger financial burden on students. At this point in the discussion, the conflict is substantive; it is focused on issues. However, when responding to Dee, Charles rolls his eyes and states that "only a political fool believes that higher fees are the answer to the problem." Not only does Dee disagree with Charles on the issues, but she is also angered by his comment. Now the conflict is not just substantive; it has become affective as well.

Constructive/functional and Destructive/Dysfunctional Conflict

Conflict itself is neither good nor bad. However, the way in which a group deals with conflict can be constructive or destructive.

Destructive conflict results when groups engage in behaviors that create hostility and prevent achievement of the group's goal. Constant complaining, personal insults, conflict avoidance, and loud arguments or threats all contribute to destructive conflict. The quality of group decision making deteriorates when members are inflexible and not open to other points of view. Destructive conflict has the potential to permanently disable a group

Constructive conflict results when group members express disagreement in a way that values everyone's contributions and promotes the group's goal. Groups committed to constructive conflict abide by the following principles:

■ Disagreement is not punished. "I'm not afraid of being fired for disagreeing with other members."

■ Members work with each other to achieve a mutually satisfying resolution of conflict. "We can work this out. After all, we're all after the same thing in the long run."

■ Lower-status members are free to disagree with higher-status group members. "I know she's the CEO, but I think there are some disadvantages to the approach she suggests."

■ The group has an agreed-upon approach for conflict resolution and decision making. "Our group is using the Nominal Group Technique, so I know my ideas will be heard and included."

■ Members can disagree and still respect each other. "The group may not like my idea, but members would never personally attack me for expressing my opinion." Constructive group conflict has many positive outcomes. Issues and people are better understood through an open exchange. The quality of decision making improves as opposing viewpoints and concerns are discussed. Expressing differences constructively can make a group discussion more interesting and promote participation.

Constructive and destructive conflict

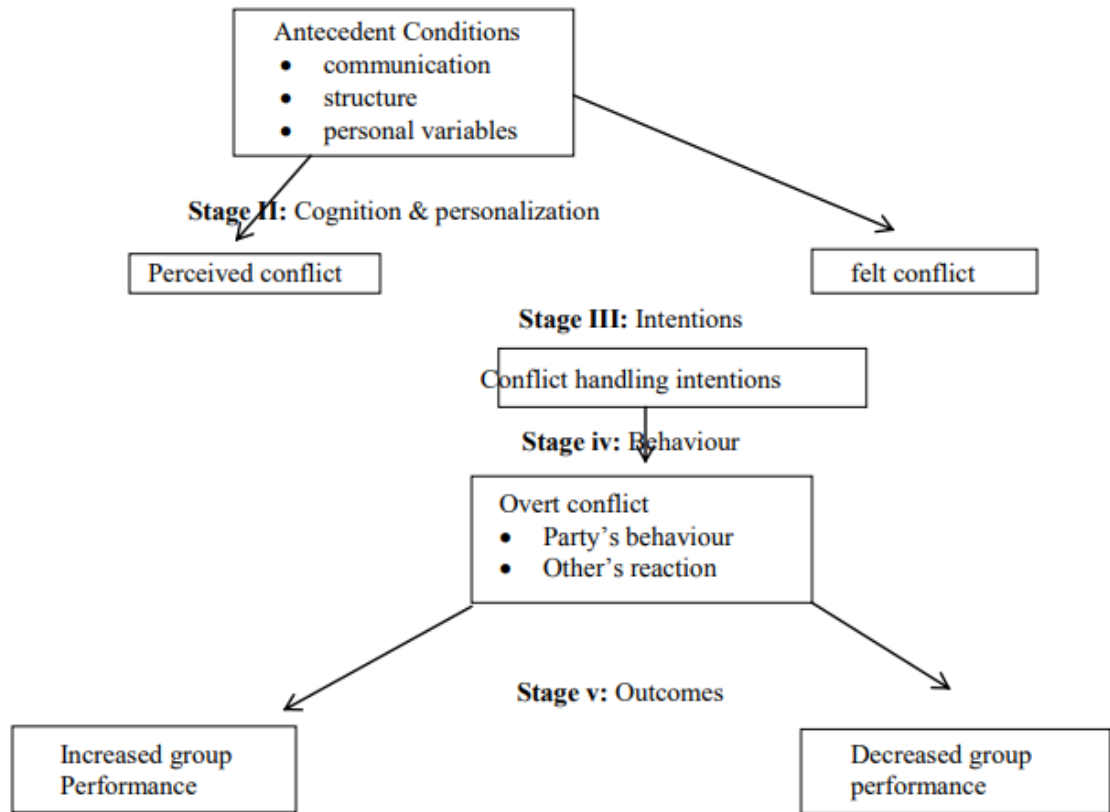| Constructive conflict	Destructive conflict
• Focus on Issues • Respect for Others • Supportiveness • Flexibility • Cooperation • Commitment to Conflict Management	• Personal • Attacks • Insults Defensiveness • Inflexibility • Competition • Avoidance of Conflict

The Conflict Process

Conflict is a process in which one party suggests that its interest are being opposed by another party. As a role, people see only the observable part of conflict – angry words and actions of opposition. But this is only a small part of the conflict process (Mcshane and Glinow, 2008).

The conflict process consists of five stages:
i.   potential opposition or incompatibility;
ii.   cognition and personalization;
iii.   Intentions;
iv.   Behavior; and
v.   Outcome

Stage I: Potential opposition or incompatibility

Antecedent Conditions
- communication
- structure
- personal variables

Stage II: Cognition & personalization

Perceived conflict

felt conflict

Stage III: Intentions

Conflict handling intentions

Stage iv: Behaviour

Overt conflict
- Party's behaviour
- Other's reaction

Stage v: Outcomes

Increased group Performance

Decreased group performance

Source: The Conflict Process (Robbins, 2005).

Approaches to Conflict Management

Groups can choose from many conflict management methods. Careful analysis of the conflict should determine which approach best suits the situation and the group. Effective group members are flexible and able to use a variety of approaches to resolving conflict.
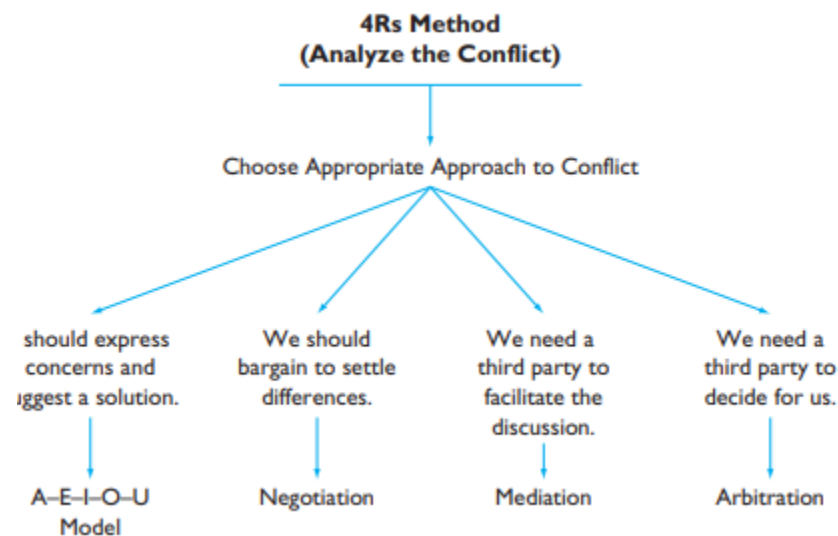
The 4Rs Method

In order to choose the most appropriate conflict management method, you should make sure you understand your group's conflict.

We suggest using the 4Rs method for analyzing the conflict in a particular situation. The four steps of the method are accompanied by these relevant questions:

➢ **Reasons.** What are the reasons for or causes of the conflict? Are the causes associated with expressed differences about issues, methods, and/or members? Do other concerned members agree with your assessment of the reasons for conflict?

➢ **Reactions**. How are group members reacting to one another? Are the reactions constructive or destructive in nature? Can member reactions be modified into more constructive behavior?

➢ **Results.** What are the consequences of the group's current approach to the conflict? Is the conflict serious enough to jeopardize the group's goal and member morale?

➢ **Resolution**. What are the available methods for resolving the conflict? Which method best matches the nature of the group and its conflict? Analyzing and understanding the nature of the disagreement will result in a better resolution. The 4Rs method provides a way of thinking about conflict and selecting an appropriate approach to conflict management.

Approaches to conflict management

4Rs Method (Analyze the Conflict)

Choose Appropriate Approach to Conflict

| should express concerns and suggest a solution. | We should bargain to settle differences. | We need a third party to facilitate the discussion. | We need a third party to decide for us. |
| A–E–I–O–U Model | Negotiation | Mediation | Arbitration |

The A-E-I-O-U Model

In order to resolve conflict, a group must fully understand member concerns. If members do not understand the problem, they cannot effectively find solutions. **Wisinski's A-E-I-O-U Model** is a way to clearly communicate concerns and suggest alternative actions.

The steps in the A-E-I-O-U Model are as follows:

- ➢ A—Assume the other members mean well.
- ➢ E—Express your feelings.
- ➢ I—Identify what you would like to happen.
- ➢ O—Outcomes you expect are made clear.
- ➢ U—Understanding on a mutual basis is achieved.
  - The first step, A, requires a belief that other group members are willing to cooperate. Such a belief could be expressed as follows: "I know that all of us want this project to be successful."
  - The second step, E, identifies your feelings associated with a specific behavior or action: "But, I'm really worried because it seems as though we're not putting in the work that's needed." Expressing your feelings and describing behavior helps the group interpret your reaction to the situation.
  - The third step, I, requires that you not only express your concerns but also identify what you want to happen: "I would like to be assured that all of you are as concerned about the success of this project as I am and that you have been thinking about how we can make sure the work gets done on time." The group can now focus its discussion on solving the problem.
  - The fourth step, O, directs you to inform members of the potential outcomes of their behavior: "I sincerely believe that if we don't work late for the next couple of days, we will not be prepared to make an effective group presentation next week."
  - The final step, U, recognizes that your group may need to discuss your suggestions: "Could we try staying late for the next few days to get ahead of the game? What do you think?" A group will frequently reject an initial suggestion but then go on to develop a more satisfactory solution. The final step requires that all group members understand and agree to a solution. When all the steps in the A-E-I-O-U Model are combined, they become the essential ingredients in creating a constructive approach

Negotiation

Negotiation is a process of bargaining in order to settle differences or reach solutions. Normally, negotiation takes the form of compromise, with group members conceding some issues in order to achieve agreement on other points. Group members are more willing to bargain if they believe they will be no worse off and might even be better off by the end of the negotiation process. Fisher, Ury, and Patton suggest that conflict can be resolved through a process of "principled negotiation."

The four principles are as follows:

- Separate the people from the problem.

- Focus on group interests, not positions.

- Generate a variety of possible solutions for mutual gain.

- Insist on objective criteria for choosing a solution.

When the focus is on defending positions, the result is winners and losers. By focusing on group interests, the entire group wins. Effective groups brainstorm alternatives and establish criteria with which to evaluate and choose a solution to their problem. Objective and agreed-upon criteria assure that no individual group member has an unfair advantage during negotiation.

The atmosphere is more competitive, partisan, and political in negotiation than it would be if the climate were suitable for collaboration. Wood notes that "because it allows members to pursue personal interests while acknowledging those of others, negotiation constrains communication to respect a delicate balance between individualism and interdependence." However, group negotiation can become deadlocked when members are unable to appreciate the needs of others or are unwilling to make concessions. The following strategies can help break a deadlock:

- Limit the scope of the problem by dividing it into manageable parts.

- Minimize defensive behavior by having members explain or paraphrase the other side's position.

- Summarize areas of agreement to promote further cooperation.

- Take a break to relieve group tensions.

- Ask for more information to avoid inaccurate assumptions.

Clearly, group members must balance a variety of needs during negotiation. They must be willing to cooperate with others while attempting to meet as many of their own needs as possible. They must openly communicate what they are willing to concede yet not sacrifice more than necessary. Finally, members must balance the need to gain their own short-term goals against the benefits of mutually desirable long-term conflict resolution.

Mediation

In recent years, a process called mediation has become a more commonly used tool for resolving disputes. Mediation is "facilitated negotiation employs the services of impartial third parties only for the purpose of guiding, coaching, and encouraging the disputants through negotiation to successful resolution and agreement." Mediation is an appropriate approach to conflict resolution when group members are unable to resolve the conflict by themselves and when everyone concerned is willing to participate in the process and abide by the final settlement. If group members cannot agree to these terms, then mediation is not an option.

Once a group has decided to use mediation, there are two basic requirements: an impartial mediator and a well-planned mediation session. The group must choose an impartial mediator who is not involved in the conflict. If a conflict involves all members of the group, a mediator from outside the group should be chosen. The group leader or another group member should be considered as a mediator only if he or she is not involved in the conflict. The mediator does not take sides in the dispute. Instead, he or she guides the group through the process and facilitates negotiation.

Arbitration

Groups often resort to mediation when all other methods of resolving a conflict have failed. If mediation does not work, a group may seek arbitration. Arbitration, like mediation, involves a third party. However, after considering all sides, the arbitrator decides how to resolve the conflict. The arbitrator may choose one person's solution or may develop a solution the group has not yet considered. Whatever the final decision, group members are obligated to accept and implement the solution, no matter what they think about the decision. When turning to an arbitrator to make a decision, group members "have acknowledged that their own decision-making powers are insufficient to resolve the dispute. Their function, therefore, is to present their side of the case as fully and as capably as possible so that fairness and justice can prevail." Despite the hope for a just outcome, professional arbitrators understand that their decisions may not satisfy or please everyone in a group. However, for groups that cannot resolve conflicts or solve problems on their own or with the help of a mediator, arbitration may be the only way to make a needed decision.

Group Cohesion

Resolving conflict in groups does not guarantee success, nor does it ensure that group members will work together in pursuit of a common goal. Working in groups also requires cohesiveness. Cohesion is the mutual attraction that holds the members of a group together. Groups that are

cohesive feel committed and unified; members develop a sense of teamwork and pride in the group. The following are characteristics of a cohesive group:

- High levels of interaction
- A friendly and supportive communication climate
- A desire to conform to group expectations
- The use of creative and productive approaches to achieving goals
- Satisfied members

Enhancing Cohesion

 Cohesive groups are happier and get more work done. Clearly, your group wants to strive for cohesion. Based on Bormann and Bormann, we suggest four general strategies for developing group cohesion.

Establish a Group Identity and Traditions

Begin by referring to the group with terms such as we and our instead of I and my. The language that members use to refer to the group can influence the way they perceive their connection to it. Some groups create more obvious signs of identity such as a group name, logo, or motto. As members continue to work and interact with one another, the group begins to develop its own history. Many groups develop rituals and ceremonies to reinforce traditions.

Emphasize Teamwork

The members of cohesive groups believe that their contributions are essential to the success of the group. Group members feel responsibility for and take pride in the work they do as well as the work of other members. They frequently make statements that stress the importance of everyone's role. Rather than the individual members taking personal credit for success, a cohesive group will emphasize the group's accomplishments. Recognize and Reward Contributions. Frequently, group members become so involved in their own work that they neglect to praise others for their contributions. In addition, members are often quick to criticize others' mistakes and poor work. While constructive criticism is important, members must feel that their efforts are appreciated. Cohesive groups establish a climate in which praise is encouraged. Many groups reward individual efforts and initiative. Celebration dinners, letters of appreciation, certificates, and gifts are all ways in which some groups reward themselves.

Respect Group Members.

 When strong interpersonal relationships are developed in groups, members become more sensitive to each other's needs. Groups that require members to do their part of the work

without regard for individual concerns will develop little cohesion. Treating members with respect, showing concern for their personal needs, and appreciating diversity will promote a feeling of acceptance.

Groupthink

Groupthink is a term that describes the deterioration of group effectiveness that results from in-group pressure. Highly cohesive groups are at greater risk of succumbing to groupthink. Bennis, Parikh, and Lessem suggest that "perhaps the most damaging disease to a group's health is over-conformity, always the result of group pressure."

Symptoms of Groupthink.

Irving Janis, a professor at Yale University, developed the theory of groupthink after recognizing patterns in what he termed policy-making fiascoes. He suggests that groupthink was a significant factor in several major policy decisions, including the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba, the escalation of both the Korean and Vietnam wars, the attack on Pearl Harbor, and the Watergate burglary and cover-up. Groupthink may also have contributed to the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger. After analyzing many of these policy decisions, Janis identified eight symptoms of groupthink.

Dealing with Groupthink. The best way to deal with groupthink is to prevent it from happening in the first place. The following list provides practical ways to minimize the potential of groupthink. Choose the methods that are most appropriate for your group.

- Ask each member to serve in the role of critical evaluator.
- If possible, have more than one group work on the same problem independently.
- Discuss the group's progress with someone outside the group. Report the feedback to the entire group.
- Periodically invite an expert to join your meeting and encourage constructive criticism.
- Discuss the potential negative consequences of any decision or action.
- Follow a formal decision-making procedure that encourages expression of disagreement and evaluation of ideas.
- Ask questions, offer reasons for positions, and demand justifications from others.
- Before finalizing the decision, give members a second chance to express doubts.

In the short term, groupthink decisions are easier. The group finishes early and doesn't have to deal with conflict. However, the decision is often poor and sometimes results in harm. Spending the time and energy to work through differences will result in better decisions without sacrificing group cohesiveness.

Reference:-

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Question:-

1.) Define conflict and its types.
2.) Explain the sources of conflict.
3.) Discuss the process of conflict.