[Frequently Asked Questions]

Organizational Conflict

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Frequently Asked Questions

Q1. Explain the Traditional View of Conflict.

A1. The early approach to conflict assumed all conflict was bad and to be avoided. Conflict was viewed negatively and discussed with such terms as violence, destruction, and irrationality to reinforce its negative connotation. This traditional view of conflict was consistent with attitudes about group behavior that prevailed in the 1930s and 1940s. Conflict was a dysfunctional outcome resulting from poor communication, a lack of openness and trust between people, and the failure of managers to be responsive to the needs and aspirations of their employees.

The view that all conflict is bad certainly offers a simple approach to looking at the behavior of people who create conflict. We need merely direct our attention to the causes of conflict and correct those malfunctions to improve group and organizational performance. This view of conflict fell out of favor for a long time as researchers came to realize that some level of conflict was inevitable.

Q2. Explain the Interactionist View of Conflict.

A2. The interactionist view of conflict encourages conflict on the grounds that a harmonious, peaceful, tranquil, and cooperative group is prone to becoming static, apathetic, and unresponsive to needs for change and innovation. The major contribution of this view is recognizing that a minimal level of conflict can help keep a group viable, self-critical, and creative. The interactionist view does not propose that all conflicts are good. Rather, **functional conflict** supports the goals of the group and improves its performance and is, thus, a constructive form of conflict. A conflict that hinders group performance is a

destructive or **dysfunctional conflict**. We need to look at the type of conflict—whether it's connected to task, relationship, or process. **Task conflict** relates to the content and goals of the work. **Relationship conflict** focuses on interpersonal relationships. **Process conflict** relates to how the work gets done.

Q3. Explain dimensions of Conflict handling intentions.
A3.

- **Competing:** When one person seeks to satisfy his or her own interests regardless of the impact on the other parties to the conflict, that person is **competing**. You compete when you place a bet that only one person can win, for example.

- **Collaborating:** When parties in conflict each desire to fully satisfy the concerns of all parties, there is cooperation and a search for a mutually beneficial outcome. In **collaborating**, the parties intend to solve a problem by clarifying differences rather than by accommodating various points of view. If you attempt to find a win–win solution that allows both parties' goals to be completely achieved, that's collaborating.

- **Avoiding:** A person may recognize a conflict exists and want to withdraw from or suppress it. Examples of **avoiding** include trying to ignore a conflict and avoiding others with whom you disagree.

- **Accommodating:** A party who seeks to appease an opponent may be willing to place the opponent's interests above his or her own, sacrificing to maintain the relationship. We refer to this intention as **accommodating**. Supporting someone else's opinion despite your reservations about it, for example, is accommodating.

- **Compromising:** In **compromising**, there is no clear winner or loser. Rather, there is a willingness to ration the object of the conflict and accept a solution that provides incomplete satisfaction of both parties' concerns. The distinguishing characteristic of compromising, therefore, is that each party intends to give up something.

Q4. Explain Conflict management techniques.

A4.

1. Conflict-Resolution Techniques

- **Problem solving:** Face-to-face meeting of the conflicting parties for the purpose of identifying the problem and resolving it through open discussion.
- **Superordinate goals**: Creating a shared goal that cannot be attained without the cooperation of each of the conflicting parties.
- **Expansion of resources:** When a conflict is caused by the scarcity of a resource (for example, money, promotion, opportunities, office space), expansion of the resource can create a win-win solution.
- **Avoidance**: Withdrawal from or suppression of the conflict.
- **Smoothing**: Playing down differences while emphasizing common interests between the conflicting parties.
- **Compromise***:* Each party to the conflict gives up something of value.
- **Authoritative command**: Management uses its formal authority to resolve the conflict and then communicates its desires to the parties involved.

- **Altering the human variable**: Using behavioral change techniques such as human relations, training to alter attitudes and behaviors that cause conflict.
- **Altering the structural variables:** Changing the formal organization structure and the interaction patterns of conflicting parties through job redesign, transfers, creation of coordinating positions, and the like.

2. Conflict-Stimulation Techniques

- **Communication**: Using ambiguous or threatening messages to increase conflict levels.
- **Bringing in outsiders**: Adding employees to a group whose backgrounds, values, attitudes, or managerial styles differ from those of present members.
- **Restructuring the organization:** Realigning work groups, altering rules and regulations, increasing interdependence, and making similar structural changes to disrupt the status quo.
- **Appointing a devil's advocate:** Designating a critic to purposely argue against the majority positions held by the group.

Q5. Explain Dysfunctional outcomes of Conflict.

A5. The destructive consequences of conflict on the performance of a group or an organization are generally well known: uncontrolled opposition breeds discontent, which acts to dissolve common ties and eventually leads to the destruction of the group. Dysfunctional conflicts can reduce group effectiveness. Among the undesirable consequences are poor communication, reductions in group cohesiveness, and subordination of group goals to the primacy of infighting among members. All forms of

conflict—even the functional varieties—appear to reduce group member satisfaction and trust. When active discussions turn into open conflicts between members, information sharing between members decreases significantly. At the extreme, conflict can bring group functioning to a halt and threaten the group's survival.

Q6. Explain Resolution focused view of conflict.

A6. There are some very specific cases in which conflict can be beneficial. Workplace conflicts take time away from job tasks and hurt feelings and anger often linger after conflicts appear to be over. Task conflicts sometimes escalate into relationship conflicts. Conflicts produce stress, which may lead people to become more close minded and adversarial. Longer-term studies show that all conflicts reduce trust, respect and cohesion in groups, which reduce their long-term viability.

A growing body of research suggests we can minimize the negative effects of conflict by focusing on preparing people for conflicts, developing resolution strategies and facilitating open discussions.

The level of conflict in organizational behavior varies between micro and macro level. At the micro level lies the intra-individual conflict i.e. conflict occurring within an individual due to various reasons. This is the most basic kind of conflict where an individual confronts no one but himself/herself.

Q7. Explain the role of Structure in conflict.

A7. The requirements of the jobs can bring people into conflict. These conflicts are structural in nature. The term structure in this context includes variables such as size of the group, degree of specialization in the tasks assigned to group members, jurisdictional clarity, member–goal compatibility, leadership styles, reward systems, and the degree of dependence between groups. Size and specialization can stimulate conflict. The larger the group and the more specialized its activities, the greater the likelihood of conflict. Tenure and conflict have been found to be inversely related; the potential for conflict is greatest when group members are younger and when turnover is high. The greater the ambiguity about where responsibility for actions lies, the greater the potential for conflict to emerge. Such jurisdictional ambiguities increase intergroup fighting for control of resources and territory. Diversity of goals among groups is also a major source of conflict. When groups within an organization seek diverse ends, opportunities for conflict increase. Reward systems, too, create conflict when one member's gain comes at another's expense. Finally, if a group is dependent on another group (in contrast to the two being mutually independent), or if interdependence allows one group to gain at another's expense, opposing forces are stimulated.

Q8. Explain Cognition and Personalization in conflict process.

A8. If the conditions of Incompatibility negatively affect something one party cares about, then the potential for opposition or incompatibility becomes actualized in the second stage. As we noted in our definition of conflict, one or more of the parties must be aware that antecedent conditions exist.

However, because a conflict is a perceived one, does not mean it is personalized. In other words, "A may be aware that B and A are in serious disagreement . . . but it may not make A tense or anxious, and it may have no effect whatsoever on A's affection toward B." It is at the felt conflict level, when individuals become emotionally involved, that they experience anxiety, tension, frustration, or hostility. Keep in mind two points. First, Stage II is important because it's where conflict issues tend to be defined, where the parties decide what the conflict is about. If I define our salary disagreement as a zero-sum situation (if you get the increase in pay you want, there will be just that amount less for me), I am going to be far less willing to compromise than if I frame the conflict as a potential win–win situation (the dollars in the salary pool might be increased so both of us could get the added pay we want). Thus, the definition of a conflict is important because it typically delineates the set of possible settlements. Our second point is that emotions play a major role in shaping perceptions. Negative emotions allow us to oversimplify issues, lose trust, and put negative interpretations on the other party's behavior. In contrast, positive feelings increase our tendency to see potential relationships among the elements of a problem, to take a broader view of the situation, and to develop more innovative solutions.

Q9. Explain Personal Variables in conflict process.

A9. Have you ever met someone for whom you felt an immediate dislike? You disagreed with most of the opinions he expressed. Even insignificant characteristics—the sound of his voice, the smirk when he smiled, his personality—annoyed you.

We've all met people like that. When you have to work with such individuals, the potential for conflict arises. Our last category of potential sources of conflict is personal variables, which include personality, emotions, and values. Personality does appear to play a role in the conflict process: some people just tend to get into conflicts a lot. In particular, people high in the personality traits of disagreeableness, neuroticism, or self-monitoring are prone to tangle with other people more often, and to react poorly when conflicts occur. An employee who shows up to work irate from her hectic morning commute may carry that anger with her to her 9:00 a.m. meeting. Her anger can annoy her colleagues, which can result in a tension-filled meeting.

Q10. Explain effect of Communication in Incompatibility in conflict process.

A10. The communication can be a source of conflict. They represent the opposing forces that arise from semantic difficulties, misunderstandings, and "noise" in the communication channels. A review of the research suggests that differing word connotations, jargon, insufficient exchange of information, and noise in the communication channel are all barriers to communication and potential antecedent conditions to conflict. Research has further demonstrated a surprising finding: the potential for conflict increases when either too little or too much communication takes place. Apparently, an increase in communication is functional up to a point, after which it is possible to over-communicate, with a resultant increase in the potential for conflict.