# Unit-2
# Managing Conflicts at Workplace

# Introduction

Conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two parties who perceive incompatible goal, scarce resources and interference from others in achieving their goals. In simple words, a conflict is a disagreement between two or more people who disagree on an issue that threaten their respective goals, values or needs.

Disagreements are examples of conflict, which have to be resolved for restoration of continued peace. Life is not a bed of roses. Sometimes things may go wrong in life.

Conflict may occur between family members, workers, colleagues, supervisors and even between organisations and within organisations.

You must be reading news about incidents of fight between people and groups or strikes due to conflict between the workers and the management or between students and the administration. Such conflicts may take place due to different interests, perceptions, viewpoints, values and experiences. If a conflict is allowed to continue, it can lead to fight or violence and may harm the people involved, sometimes even resulting in loss of life.

Conflict tends to fall into two broad categories:

(i) **Conflict Between Individuals:** The reasons for conflict between individuals could be a clash of personalities, strong differences of opinion over work or an 'overspill' from personal issues outside work.

(ii) **Employees and Their Managers:** The reasons could be management style is too authoritarian or too weak, management is favouring other colleagues when assigning tasks, health and safety, uneven pay or low wages, unfair treatment, unclear job roles, inadequate training, poor communications, poor work environment, lack of equal opportunities, bullying and harassment, lack of consultation, etc.

This Unit will help in understanding the various causes and effects of conflicts and also assist you in developing competencies for managing and avoiding future conflicts.

# Session-1
# Identifying Causes and Symptoms of Conflicts at Work

Conflict at work takes many forms. It may be that two workers simply don't get on or that an individual has a grievance against their superior or the manager. It could result due to the following factors:

(i)     Perceptions

(ii)    Conflicting roles

(iii)   Different personal values

(iv)    Poor management

(v)     Unfair treatment

(vi)    Unclear job roles

(vii)   Inadequate training

(viii)  Poor communication

(ix)    Poor work environment

(x)     Lack of equal opportunities

(xi)    Bullying and harassment by superiors or colleagues

(xii)   Timeline pressures

(xiii)  Unpredictable policies

(xiv)   Unresolved issues

(xv)    Increase in workload

(xvi)   Personality clash

Recognising these causes is the first step in dealing with conflict situations. Let's examine some of the main causes of conflict[1].

1. **Differing Values:** Values are preferred courses of actions or outcomes which guide a person's behaviour and which are accepted by society as worthwhile or valuable. Examples of values are: accountability, bravery, charity, discipline, equity, freedom, generosity, honesty, integrity, justice, knowledge, love, maturity, neatness, order, peace, respect, service, trust, unity, vision, warmth, youthfulness, zeal, etc. When people have differing values, conflicts can result. If one of your personal values in life is that your family comes first, and if your boss' personal value is that work comes first, conflict can result when he/she asks you to stay late at work or to give up a planned family vacation due to project deadlines.

2. **Making Assumptions:** An assumption is a proposition or course of action that is taken for granted. Assumptions are made, based on experience, known facts and norms. An example for assumption is that all children who have passed class 8 are knowledgeable about all the topics taught in class 8. If the boss assumes that his/her employee will have finished the presentation when he gets back to office, but when he/she finds that presentation is not ready, conflict between the boss and employee can result. If the employee assumes that the boss will remember his promise of a raise in salary at the end of the month, but the boss neither give a raise nor remember that he had promised then a conflict may arise.

3. **Differing Expectations:** We expect people to know things without telling them. For example, a supervisor expects a subordinate to take notes at a meeting, but the subordinate does not do that, because he has not been told to do this ever. This leads to a conflict because a lot of things are not obvious to many people. Just because something may be your expectation, does not mean that it is understood by other people.

4. **Differences in Culture:** The way a person was brought up, his/her religion, his/her gender, his/her race, and his/her ethnicity can result in conflict with people who are different from him. A person from an urban culture is used to a faster lifestyle, whereas a person from a rural culture is used to a slower rhythm which is based on the pace of nature. If two people from these cultures have to work together, the likelihood of conflict increases.

5. **Knowledge and Ability to Deal with Conflict:** If you do not know how to resolve

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[1]Karen Ruby on
http://www.ameaningfulexistence.com/2010/03/22/know-these-five-causes-of-conflict

conflict or are unwilling to try to resolve conflict, this in itself can conflict with someone else who has more knowledge and is more willing than you are. If two departments, say sales and production are unwilling to resolve their differences on inventory, then they are bound to keep that conflict alive in the future which could ultimately lead to closing down of the organisation.

6. **Difference in Personality Types:** When different types of personalities have to work together then too there are possibilities of conflicts. When a multi-tasker has to work with a person who likes to focus on one thing at a time, he will show impatience and the task will be jeopardized.

## Symptoms of Conflict

1. **Motivation Drops:** Fewer people volunteer to take on new tasks and there is little employee input at team meetings or briefings.

2. **Behaviour Changes:** People start to make derogatory remarks towards each other and there are fewer social events organised.

3. **Productivity Falls:** There are likely to be more queries and complaints if people are not cooperating with each other.

4. **Increase in Absence:** Unhappiness may lead to depression or stress and absence from work.

## Spotting Conflict

Spotting the conflict or identifying the causes will help to manage conflict effectively. A person should identify and address the early signs of conflict. To minimise and prevent conflict in the workplace, the Head of the Institution should try to learn as much as you can about why conflicts have occured and develop processes to address them. Conflicts can be spotted by exploring the following:

♦ Unpleasant behaviour, for example, derogatory remarks made for each other.

♦ Fewer social events are organised.

♦ Falling performance or productivity of employees.

♦ Increased leave and absence of staff.

♦ Depression or stress.

## Exercise

**Assignment**

**A. Read the following situations and tick the appropriate cause of conflict**

**1 Scenario**

The teacher saw that Manoj was not allowing Ketan to write and was grabbing the pen from him. Ketan had taken Manoj's pen when he was not looking and was refusing to give it back to him. Manoj and Ketan are involved in a disagreement over the ownership of a pen, but because they are expected to stay quiet in a classroom, they are resorting to a physical disagreement. The physical quarrel has caught the attention of the teacher who is not aware of the cause.

What could be the cause of conflict between Manoj and Ketan? Tick the most appropriate phrase

(a) Different Value

(b) Different Culture

(c) Making Assumption

(d) Physical Resource

**2. Scenario**

Aryan is having an argument with Nisha. Nisha is complaining that all team members should take turns to organise coffee for the team. Aryan does not agree and is saying that as she is the only female in the team and so she should be assigned this duty.

What is the cause of conflict between Nisha and Aryan? Tick the most appropriate phrase

(a) Different Values

(b) Different Cultures

(c) Making Assumptions

(d) Different Expectations

**3. Scenario**

Two security personnel are arguing at the boundary fence. One of them is insisting that the broken fence means that somebody has entered into the premises. The other one is

arguing that the broken barbed wire looks old and rusted, therefore, there can not be any intruder.

What is the cause of conflict between the two security personnel? Tick on the appropriate box.

(a) Different Value

(b) Different Culture

(c) Making Assumption

(d) Different Expectation

4. **Scenario**

The Security Head of the BCD Hotel is arguing with the Manager of the BCD Hotel that another camera is necessary for improving security in the organisation. He argues that security personnel are overburdened and cannot be deployed efficiently. The Manager of the Hotel does not agree with the Security Head and insists that security should be managed with the existing Security Guards.

What is the cause of conflict between Security Head and Manager of the BCD Hotel? Tick on the most appropriate phrase

(a) Different Value

(b) Different Culture

(c) Different Expectation

(d) Different Personality

5. **Scenario**

Mr.Shekhar works as a Security Officer for ABC company. He works in a team of seven people who scrutinize incoming packages for hazardous material. On the team are four women and two men. They have come from three different States in India. One of the men in the team Mr.Aryan feels that Shekhar works too slowly and is not doing his full share of work. He laughs with the other team members about Shekhar and talks about him in nasty ways. It is a very uncomfortable situation for the Shekhar to work.

What is the cause of conflict between Mr.Shekhar and Mr.Aryan? Tick the most appropriate phrase.

(a) Different Values

(b) Different Cultures

(c) Different Expectations

(d) Different Personality

**Assessment**

**Short Answer Questions**

1. What is conflict?

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2. Describe any two causes of conflict between employers and employees.

**Cause 1:**

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**Cause 2:**

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## Checklist For Assessment Activity

Use the following checklist to see if you have met all the requirements for assessment activity.

**Part A**

(a) Differentiated between various causes of conflicts.

(b) Differentiated between various symptoms of conflicts.

**Part B**

Discussed in class the following:

(a) What is conflict?

(b) What are the different causes of conflict?

**Performance Standards**

The Performance Standard may include but not limited to:

| Performance Standards | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|
| Identify symptoms of conflict in a given situation | | |
| Establish the cause of conflict | | |

# Session-2
# Managing Conflict in the Workplace

Before you learn about the various ways of managing conflict at workplace, let us first try to understand the various stages of conflict.

**Stage 1: Conflict Arises:** Whenever interests or rights of individuals or groups are suppressed or compromised, conflict arises. Conflicts give rise to angry feelings, disappointments and realisation that rights or benefits have been taken away from the beneficiary group.

**Stage 2: Positions are Stated and Hardened:** The conflicting groups or individuals state their point of view and take position in an attempt to ensure that their point of view is adhered to. At this juncture, the conflicting parties have three options – fight, flight or resolve. Let us see what we mean by that.

| | |
|---|---|
| Fight | React in a challenging way or may resort to shouting or losing temper. Express displeasure on the conflict. |
| Flight | Non-confrontational, but subversive behaviour. You turn your back on what's going on. You presume that by ignoring a problem you hope it will go away. You are not sure how to react and become very passive. |
| Resolve | Plan and implement solutions that are suitable to the individuals or groups. |
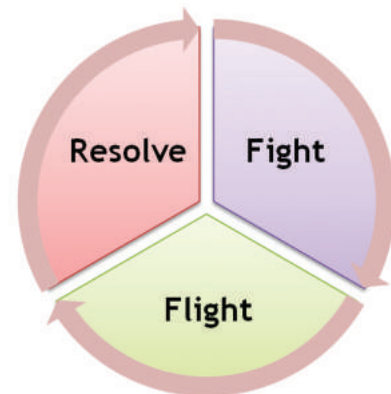


Fig. 3

**Stage 3: Resolution:** Planning and implementing solutions that are suitable for all groups. It is apparent that the process of collaboration helps to resolve conflict. The process of collaboration requires trustworthy people or people of good character.

There are five main conflict resolution scenarios. However, not all scenarios lead to resolution. Let us learn about various actions that lead to these five scenarios and try to understand their impact on conflict resolution.

**1. Ignore the Conflict:** If you have a tendency to avoid or postpone talking about the conflict, you are trying to ignore it and hope it goes away. Putting your head in the sand

and not dealing with the problem means that you will not learn from the experience. What you fail to learn, you are bound to repeat in other relationships. This scenario does not resolve conflict.

**2. Smooth Over the Conflict:** Do you try to accommodate the other person and suppress your desires? Smoothing over any conflict just to avoid confrontation or dealing with both sides of the argument can also result in a temporary reprieve. The conflict may still be there, but resentment is also present as one person has given up their values in order to smooth over the conflict. Even this scenario does not resolve the conflict.

**3. Use Your Authority to Settle the Conflict:** The statements like "This is the way that it is going to be because I said so!" Parents say this all the time to their children when they want them to go to bed and the child wants to stay up and watch TV.

Usually the boss resorts to a similar tactic to 'resolve' a conflict. For example, he/she may state "That is my order and you have to follow it". It does not make you feel very empowered when someone has perceived authority over you and tells you the way it is going to be. So this scenario does not resolve conflict as well.

**4. Negotiate a Resolution to the Conflict:** A good negotiation helps resolve conflict to some extent in which each party gets what they want, but each of them also have to give up something. For instance, if the boss wants you to work at the weekend, then you could negotiate for perks or extra payment. The boss has the advantage of engaging ready help for a little extra payment. However, you will have to give up relaxation time. Over the long run, this kind of arrangement proves harmful to you and the organisation. Lack of rest will reduce the quality of your performance and soon the organisation will stop valuing the work that you do. So, negotiation is also not a preferred action for conflict resolution over a long run.

**5. Use Collaboration to Resolve the Conflict:** Collaboration is used to resolve the conflict which is a typical win-win scenario (Figure 4). Both parties win when they use collaboration. But, collaboration only works when people trust each other to come to a mutually beneficial agreement. If trust is there, this conflict resolution scenario can

Fig. 4

be the best way to resolve conflicts once and for all. As both parties come together, communicate, and trust each other a definitive resolution to their conflict can occur.

### Preventing Conflict:

We can also prevent conflicts at workplace, but it depends on the situations and

organisational structure. The various ways by which an employer can prevent conflicts include the following:

◆ Listening and consulting with employees on decision-making.

◆ Rewarding fairly with pay or bonus schemes.

◆ Ensuring work safety.

◆ Ensuring that managers are properly trained and able to handle management responsibilities.

◆ Valuing employees and thinking about the business culture of the workplace.

◆ Treating people fairly.

◆ Communicating the law on harassment and discrimination.

◆ Encouraging initiative.

◆ Balancing employees personal and business needs.

◆ Keeping regular channels of communication open.

◆ Regularly giving out employee feedback forms or questionnaires.

## Exercise

**Case Based Problem**

**A. Read the situation carefully and answer the following questions**

**1. Scenario**

Six months have passed since the problem started. As usual the broadband connection of the ABC company turns slow after the 15th of the month. The Head of Security complained again for the fifth time to the Head of Information Technology (IT) Department as his team is unable to send reports through the Internet. However, the IT department have not been able to solve the problem.

**Identify the Stages of Conflict by Filling the Following Blanks**

(a) The two parties in the conflict are: _____ and _____

(b) The Head of Security and his team have been unable to send _____ due to the problem.

(c) The problem persists even as the Head of Security complaint for the _____ time to the Head, IT department.

**2. Scenario**

Two Security Personnel came to the Security Supervisor with a complaint. The Supervisor realised that they had a complaint against each other. Before continuing the conversation, he closed the door of his office and listened to their grievances. He then counselled them and they both went back happily.

The Supervisor closed the door before talking to the Security Personnel because he wanted to:

Tick the most appropriate phrase:

(a) Ensure that no one else should interfere in their conversation.

(b) Be neutral as far as possible.

(c) Be secretive about the conversation.

(d) Be impartial in dealing with them.

## Assessment

**Fill in the Blanks**

1. Whenever interests or rights of individuals or groups are suppressed or compromised then_____ arises.

2. In case of conflict, the conflicting parties have three options i.e. _____, flight or resolve.

3. A good negotiation helps _____ conflict to some extent, in which each party gets what they want, but each of them also have to give up something.

4. Both parties win when they use _____ to resolve the conflict.

5. We can resolve conflicts at workplace by listening and consulting _____ before taking decision.

## Checklist For Assessment Activity

Use the following checklist to see if you have met all the requirements for assessment activity.

**Part A**

(a) Differentiated between various stages of conflicts.

(b) Differentiated between various action that could lead to resolution of conflict.

**Part B**

Discussed in class the following:

(a) What are the different stages of conflict?

(b) What are the various ways of preventing conflict at workplace?

**Part C**

**Performance Standards**

The Performance Standard covered by the assessment includes the following, but not limited to:

| Performance Standards | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|
| Identify the stage of conflict in a given situation | | |
| Demonstrate the ability for resolving conflict in a given situation | | |
| Apply the principles of conflict resolution | | |
| List three measures that an employee can take to prevent conflict at workplace | | |
| List two measures that an employer can take to prevent conflict at workplace | | |

# Session-3
# Mitigating Conflicts by Valuing and Attitude

**Relevant Knowledge**

Valuing people at workplace means ensuring that all employees are valued and treated with dignity and respect at work, irrespective of their race, colour, nationality, ethnic origin, disability, age, religion, marital status and sex. An attitude can be defined as a positive or negative evaluation of people, objects, event, activities, ideas, or anything in environment. For example, to work effectively in a structured environment, I should

have an attitude of performing in a timely manner to deliver a high quality product or service, which provides satisfaction to the customer. Some general attitudes that are effective in a workplace are: positive attitude, flexibility, frugality, loyalty, openness to learn, etc. Let us look at some of the attitudes which are useful in keeping a work environment free from emotional conflicts.

## Valuing Participation:

Participation is the process of involving all stakeholders in an enterprise and making them feel that they are valuable and have something to contribute. For example, a decision to keep the gates closed after 10 AM until closing time will prove unrealistic in the absence of information from the security personnel at the gate. This information about the time, duration and frequency of legitimate movement of people and material at the gate becomes readily available when the participation of gate security personnel is sought in a transparent manner.

People have been known to withhold valuable information, when they perceive lack of value for their task and ability. You should ensure that all communication is relevant, concise and delivered in a suitable way.

Employees should be consulted before decisions are made. Some phrases that you may use to exhibit value of participation are:

♦ Will you please help me out?

♦ Please attend the meeting. I would like to hear your perspective.

♦ How do you do this particular process?

♦ Let us know your opinion by filling out this form.

## Openness to Diversity:

Diversity is defined as the state or fact of being different or unlike the general population. In India, in the work environment, there is diversity of race, culture, gender, socio-economic status, age, religious beliefs and others. Openness to diversity involves exploring, understanding, willingly accepting and celebrating the diversity in each individual in a safe, positive and nurturing environment. Equal opportunity should be given to all diversities to grow, learn and earn all the perks available in the organisation.

## Openness to Reflection:

Reflection is a mental exercise of reviewing a course of action on an individual or a group or an organisational level. Reflection leads to identification of problems, the factors that led to them and how they can be changed. The value of openness to reflection is based on the realisation that improvement is possible in the best of people, products, services,

decisions or situations. However, if an action is repeated the results will remain the same every time. Change is possible only if the people involved are willing to reflect on themselves and their part in a particular situation. The power of reflection is enhanced in an environment where people feel safe to freely express their thoughts without fear of threats and punishment and individuals develop the capacity to publicly challenge their own thinking, even if it reveals some uncertainty on their part.

For example, the Human Resource Department (HRD) is receiving regular complaints about the fact that the queue at the entrance gate is growing day by day and is making personnel late. In such a situation the HRD and the security department should engage in reflection about the processes being followed and come up with more appropriate processes. This shows that both these departments are open to reflection and change for the better.

### Openness to Mistakes:

Mistakes here are understood in the light of the understanding that 'nothing or nobody is perfect' and 'zero defect' is an illusion. In such a scenario, a situation could be examined for mistakes and mistakes should be acknowledged without being offended. This will lead to learning which can be applied to resolve conflicts, strengthen the organisation and themselves.

### Managing Anger:

Anger is an emotion which manifests as a strong feeling of displeasure and belligerence aroused by a wrong. Anger can manifest as wrath which is destructive or it could manifest as irritation which is a mild degree of anger. An important aspect of managing conflict is to be able to mange one's own anger. When a conflict arises you should try to take a calm approach and not react in a challenging way. A security officer has the unenviable task of protecting property and people from harmful elements, one of them being people. This entails a basic attitude of suspicion towards people irrespective of their position or status. The role of the Security Officer requires him to keep a distance. Usually this restriction generates anger in either the visitor or the Security Officer which could escalate into an explosive situation. Hence a Security Officer needs to understand anger, its repercussions and anger management.

**Causes of Anger:** Anger could be caused by internal and external causes. Internal causes are to do with the personality of the individual  and external causes

are to do with the factors outside the individual. Some personality characteristics that cause anger include the following:

♦ Negative Self-Talk

♦ Blaming

- Taking things personally
- Assuming
- Overeating
- Drinking Alcohol
- Driving Recklessly
- Taking Drugs
- Involvement in fights
- Feeling outraged

## External Factors

- Crisis in the form of an emergency or an important event.
- Angry visitors or customers.
- Being short-staffed.

## Repercussions of Anger:

Anger can have immediate or far-reaching consequences. Some of these consequences can be categorised as follows:

**(i) Immediate Consequences**

- Physical harm to someone or self.
- Destruction of property.

**(ii) Far-Reaching Consequences**

- Getting a bad reputation
- Loss of family / friends
- Loss of job
- Loss of social privileges
- Going to jail

## Anger Management

You can manage your anger in several ways. Some of the measures and methods that could be adopted include the following:

- Take time out from your routine work and relax.

- Take deep breaths.

- Count to ten mentally.

- Name the problem, look for plausible solutions, pick the best solution and solve the problem. Do not forget to congratulate yourself.

- Stop blaming others and self, as blaming only keeps people upset and keeps you from respecting others.

- Do not holds on to anger, but find ways of letting it go.

- Look for someone with whom you will be comfortable enough to express yourself.

- Be open to discuss your own words and actions that hurt others.

- Know yourself and choose to contain your rage and decide what to do.

- Stand up for yourself and others when you see that there is a chance of being hurt.

- Watch your thoughts, words and actions about others.

- Take ownership of the hurtful things that you do and say.

- Stop hurting people with your actions and words. Bullying hurts everyone.

### Exercise

**Case Based Problems**

**A. Read the Situations and Answer the Questions that Follow.**

**1. Scenario**

A meeting was called of all the personnel involved in the upcoming exhibition that was planned to be held next week by the Manager of the ABC company. Each person was asked to write down the most important task that he/she was expected to perform at the function.

The scenario is an example of_____.

Tick the most appropriate phrase.

(a) Valuing Participation

(b) Openness to Diversity

(c) Openness to Reflection

(d) Openness to Mistakes

## 2. Scenario

An editorial committee was formed to produce the school magazine. The committee consisted of 2 language teachers, the commerce teacher, the art teacher, students from each of the junior, middle and senior schools who were good at language.

The scenario is an example of _____.

Tick the most appropriate phrase.

(a) Valuing Participation

(b) Openness to Diversity

(c) Openness to Reflection

(d) Openness to Mistakes

## 3. Scenario

After the annual function, the Principal called a meeting of all the committees and congratulated the team members for their contributions and hard work. She also made an assessment of the lacunae and inconvenience caused to the people during the function in terms of (a) What went wrong? (b) What was not satisfactory? (c) What need to be changed? (d) How things should be improved?

The scenario is an example of_____.

Tick the most appropriate phrase.

(a) Valuing Participation

(b) Openness to Diversity

(c) Openness to Reflection

(d) Openness to Mistakes

## Assessment

### A. Short Answer Questions

1. What is Valuing People at Workplace?

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2. What is Attitude?

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3. List Five causes of Anger

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## Checklist For Assessment Activity

Use the following checklist to see if you have met all the requirements for assessment activity.

**Part A**

(a) Differentiated between valuing participation and openness to reflection.

(b) Differentiated between openness to reflection and openness to mistakes.

**Part B**

Discussed in class the following:

(a) How wrong attitudes can lead to conflict?

(b) How positive attitudes mitigate or prevent emotional conflicts?

(c) Why do we need to value other's opinion and views?

**Performance Standards**

The Performance Standard may include but not limited to:

| Performance Standards | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|
| Compile a list of activities to be performed for controlling anger | | |
| List 05 expressions of anger at work place | | |
| List 2 external factors that aggravate anger | | |
| Demonstrate deep breathing exercises for managing anger | | |

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