

What are the Causes of Conflict?

Earlier scientists like Darwin saw conflict as inherent in the principles of struggle for existence and survival of the fittest, while for Malthus, the champion of population theory, reduced supply of the means of subsistence is the cause of conflict.



Some sociologists like Ratzenhofer and Gumplowicz regard it as underlying social evolution and progress. According to Ratzenhofer, the struggle for life takes the form of conflict in interests. For Gumplowicz, it represents a primordial feeling of 'syngenism' – a feeling of belonging together.

There are two main approaches which have analysed the causes of conflict in their own way:

(1) Psychological Approach:

This approach tries to look for the causes of conflict in human nature and posits a 'fighting instinct'. This is exemplified in the views of Simmel, Freud and Lorenz. According to Freud, there is an innate instinct for aggression in man which is responsible for conflict in human society.

Recent biological and anthropological studies have generally supported the notion that there is an 'aggressive instinct', resulting from natural selection. This theory has been criticised on various grounds. It is said that the theory which depends upon a permanent and constant aggressive instinct cannot explain the cycle of conflict and absence of conflict. It only explains the propensity to engage in aggressive behaviour.

(2) Sociological Approach:

This approach is based on a theory of interests i.e., conflict occurs, for example, when territory is invaded. This approach has its roots in the Marxist tradition. This tradition assumes that social life is shaped by groups and individuals who struggle or compete with one another over various resources and rewards.

These shape not only the patterns of everyday life and interaction, but also large patterns such as racial, ethnic and class relations. Marx

argues that most conflict is economic and rests on the unequal ownership and control of property.

There are many other causes of conflict, which may be briefly stated as under:

(1) Individual Differences:

No two men are alike in their nature, attitudes, ideals, opinions and interests. These differences lead them to some or the other sort of conflict to fulfill their individual interest. Because of these differences, they fail to accommodate themselves with each other.

(2) Cultural Differences:

Culture differs from society to society and also group to group. These differences sometimes cause tension and lead to conflict. The religious differences have often led to wars and persecution in history. In India, often, communal conflicts broke out which are the results of religious differences.

(3) Clash of Interests:

The interests of different people or groups occasionally clash. For example, the interests of workers clash with those of the employers which leads to conflict in the form of strike, bandh or dharana etc. among them.

(4) Social Change:

All parts of society do not change with the same speed. This causes 'lag' in the parts which may cause conflict between different parts of the society. Conflict of generations (parent-youth) is the result of such social changes.

Causes and Types of Conflict Found in an Organization

Causes of Conflict:

The causes of conflict can be best understood through the analysis of the sources of conflict. In fact, conflict triggers have already been elaborated, but here we need to focus on a detailed categorization of those triggers through the classification of the causal factors of conflict.

Need-based conflicts:

Employees differ in their perceived needs hence depending on the varied nature of their needs, conflict may be due to multiplicity of needs, incongruency of needs, needs dissatisfaction, and dilemma of choice.



Work-environment related conflicts:

The work environment can also be a potential source of conflict. The job roles of individual employees, their job interactions, line and staff conflict, and finally the job itself could be the potential sources of conflict.

Organizational factors and conflicts:

Often organizational factors such as authority and responsibility, excessive or low standardization, transfers, communication, scarcity of resources, etc. could be the potential sources of conflicts.

Goals and conflict:

Often conflict arises due to the differences in the goals and objectives, both between individuals and between individuals and organizations. It could be a win-win conflict, lose-lose conflict or a win-lose conflict.

Individual factors:

People also differ from each other in terms of differences in culture, education, status, ideology, attitude, experience, competition, and conflict. Such individual differences could be the potential sources of conflict.

Types of Conflict:

While acknowledging Fred Luthan's contribution to conflict, we have classified various types of conflict as intra-personal, inter-personal, inter- group, and organization-environment. However, intra-personal conflict issues can be taken care of through the recruitment and selection process by not considering the candidates with a profile mismatch. Hence organizations can prevent occurrence of such conflicts, by eliminating those who are attitudinally not compatible.

The most commonly observed conflicts in organizations can be classified as follows:

Inter-personal conflict:

This type of conflict takes place between two or more individuals and is most common in organizations. Differences in perceptions, goals, attitudes and values, personality clashes, and competitiveness are the prime sources of interpersonal conflict.



Inter-group conflict:

Inter-group conflicts are more evident when an organizational structure itself increases the interdependence among groups. Since different groups may have incompatible goals and different groups may compete for common and scarce resources, intergroup conflicts are more visible in organizations.

Conflict between an organization and the prevailing work environment:

To cope with the competitive pressures, organizations often feel compelled to adopt a new work culture departing from their age-old practices. This creates conflict between the organization and the

organizational practices, which at its extreme stage, leads to major organizational issues such as high rate of attrition, employee unrest, and major industrial-relations problems

What are the Potential Causes of Inter-Group Conflict?

The causes of inter-group conflict are as follows:

(i) Lack of Communication:

Faulty communication leads to suspicion and a lack of trust.

(ii) Relative Deprivation:

It arises due to comparison when members of a group feel that they do not have what they desire to have or are not doing well in comparison to other groups.

(iii) Belief of being Superior from the Other:

It occurs when one party believes it is better than the other and every member wants to respect the norms of his/ her group.

(iv) Respect for Norms:

Conflict arises when there is a feeling that the other group violates norms.

(v) Harm done in the Past:

Some harm done in the past could be the reason for conflict.

(vi) Biased Perception:

Feelings of ‘they’ and ‘we’ lead to biased perceptions.

(vii) Competition:

Groups compete over scarce resources—both material resources e.g. territory and money as well as social resources e.g. respect and esteem.

(viii) Contributions:

If you contribute more and get less, you are likely to feel irritated and exploited.

Some of the conflict resolution strategies are:

(i) Introduction of Super-ordinate Goals:

A super-ordinate goal is mutually beneficial to both parties, hence both groups work cooperatively.

(ii) Changing Perceptions:

It can be reduced by altering perceptions and reactions through persuasion, educational and media appeals and portrayal of groups differently in society.

(iii) Increasing Intergroup Contacts:

This can be done by involving groups in conflict on neutral grounds through community projects and events.

(iv) Redrawing group Boundaries:

This can be done by creating conditions where group boundaries are re-defined and groups come to perceive themselves as belonging to a common group.

(v) Negotiations:

This refers to reciprocal communications so as to reach an agreement in situations in which there is conflict.

(vi) Structural solutions:

Conflict can be reduced by redistributing societal resources based on equality, need and equity.

(vii) Respect for other group's norms:

In order to avoid events like communal riots between different groups, it is necessary to respect and be sensitive to norms of various social and ethnic groups.

