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Conflict and Conflict Resolution: A Conceptual Analysis

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Abstract

Conflict is an inevitable and all-pervasive element in our society and in the world. Conflicts are long lasting aspects of human behavior and social relationships. Conflict is a situation between at least two interdependent parties that is characterized by perceived differences and that the parties evaluate as negative. Although conflicts may end up in destruction and even death, conflicts may also result in increased effectiveness, enhanced relationships, and further goal attainment. Conflicts have positive as well as negative consequences for the parties involved and for the larger social system of which the disputing parties are members. Conflict resolution is a process of managing a conflict and negotiating a solution. Conflict resolution is the methods and process of negotiation, arbitration, and institution building which promote the peaceful ending of social conflict. The conflict resolution approaches also point out strategies that could be employed to find an exit from the conflict's destroying dynamic and that aim toward achieving satisfying solution for all parties involved. In this paper an attempt is made to examine the concept and various aspects of Conflict and Conflict Resolution.

Keywords: Conflict, Intrapersonal Conflict, Interpersonal Conflict, Intragroup Conflict, Intergroup Conflict, Conflict Management, Negotiation, Conflict Resolution.

Conflict is an inevitable and all-pervasive element in our society and in the world. Conflict is a situation between at least two interdependent parties that is characterized by perceived differences and that the parties evaluate as negative. This often results in negative emotional states and behaviors intended to prevail. Although conflicts may end up in destruction and even death, conflicts may also result in increased effectiveness, enhanced relationships, and further goal attainment. Indeed, in human terms conflict is one of the "engines of evolution" that allows us to learn, progress, and grow. Since the dawn of the civilization on this planet, conflict remains an important part of human society from individual level to international level. Every conflict is unique with its own pattern, structure, actors and beliefs or grievances of power and varies from age to age. It is the biological and cultural survival or national interest of state, which defines the demand and supply of states according to their needs and causes the conflict among the parties. Thus, conflict is an inevitable phenomenon and has various causes to erupt among the societies and states. Conflicts are long lasting aspects of human behavior and social relationships.

With the modification of societies, the causes and consequences of conflict remain unpredictable but some basic principles are same.

Conflict resolution is a process of managing a conflict and negotiating a solution. It is the methods and process of negotiation, arbitration, and institution building which promote the peaceful ending of social conflict. The conflict resolution approaches also point out strategies that could be employed to find an exit from the conflict's destroying dynamic and that aim toward achieving satisfying solution for all parties involved. Conflict resolution is a process of managing a conflict and negotiating a solution. In this paper an attempt is being made to examine the concept and various aspects of conflict and conflict resolution.

Objectives:

In this paper an attempt is made to examine the following objectives:

1. To explore the concept and various aspects of conflict.
2. To explore the concept and various aspects of conflict resolution.

Methodology:

This paper is completely based on secondary sources. Secondary data are collected from different books web sources.

Concept of Conflict:

Conflict is a clash or struggle between opposing forces, ideas, or interests. It encompasses physical battles, active disagreements, and psychological or scheduling incompatibilities. The word 'conflict' is derived from a Latin word 'confligere' which means literally, "to strike together." It has been defined by various people with different perspectives but has the same conclusion. In this sense conflicts are not seen as a matter of subjective definition but have determined by social structure. In other words, conflict is an incompatible interests built in to the structure of the system where conflict is located. Conflict occurs across personal, social, and global domains. A conflict situation exists when there are: at least two parties involved who are interdependent, who are experiencing strong emotions, who seemingly hold incompatible outcomes or beliefs, and at least one of the parties recognize the incompatibility and perceives this to be problematic.

During our daily lives, we are all involved in a number of conflicts. Sometimes, the conflicts may be small, for example, a person may ignore us while we are talking. Sometimes, the conflict may be more serious, for example, two persons behaving violently toward each other. Whether big or small, conflict is not confined only to a person and the people around her/him. It can be between people who are even not associated with them. A conflict can, for example, be between people and the prevailing laws. Conflict does not only occur at the personal level but also at the national and even international level. Apart from external conflicts between individuals or groups, there can also be internal conflicts within an individual. It is an inevitable part of living because it is related to situations of scarce resources, division of functions, power relations and role-differentiation. Using the term in a broad sense it may be suggested that conflict refers to all kinds of antagonistic interactions. More specifically, it can be termed as a situation in which two or more parties have incompatible objectives and in which their perceptions and behaviour are commensurate with that incompatibility.

As per the traditional definition of conflict, it is the result of opposing interests involving scarce resources, goal divergence and frustration. Conflict is not defined simply in terms of violence or hostility attitudes, but also includes incompatibility or differences in issue position. In brief, the conflict means: perceived differences in issue positions between two or more parties at the same moment in time. It assumes a violent dimension when: (i) there is no superior force or effective regulatory mechanism to balance the struggle and thus prevent the situation from becoming more intense, and (ii) the parties involved employ physical force or lethal means to inflict injury and damage, or to eliminate the opponent in the quest to secure the value(s) at stake.

Definition of Conflict:

The word 'conflict' is derived from a Latin word 'confligere' which means literally, "to strike together." It has been defined by various people with different perspectives but has the same conclusion. Johan Galtung, the founder of the peace and conflict studies, provides a definition of conflict as, "an action system is said to be in conflict if the system has two or more in compatible goal states". In the same context R.C. Mitchell states that conflict is a situation in which two or more human beings desire goals which they perceive as being obtainable by one or the other, but not both". This compact definition can be clarified by saying that there must be at least two parties; each mobilizing energy to obtain a goal, a desired object or situation, and each party perceives others as a barrier to that goal. It is important to state that the conflict is a part of any human interaction which results in disagreements and lead to the path of conflict. In this perspective Sigmund Fried says, "we assume that human instincts are of two kinds; those that conserve and unify... and second the instincts that destroy and kill..."

The above definitions reflect that the incompatible or mismatched goals between more than two parties/ states lead to conflict. However, only violence and war is not necessary condition to end a conflict. Because men are not born with a singular instinct but have both the characters to conserve and unify (Peace) and destroy and kill (war). When two or more individuals, groups, nations states, etc. interact on certain issues there is a possibility of differences in their opinions and clash of interest that results in disagreement which can lead to a conflict. The occurrence of conflict can be handled with both of these tendencies which are within the reach of the involving parties or their neighboring societies. Parties can use the strategies of conflict resolution and management like self-help approach, negotiation, mediation, intervention, and diplomacy, etc. to limit the conflict from escalation.

Types of Conflict:

Conflicts are generally categorized by the scale and the number of people involved. Types of conflicts are briefly presented below.

Intrapersonal: The intrapersonal conflict is a conflict experienced by a single individual, when his or her own goals, values or roles diverge. This is an internal, psychological struggle occurring entirely within a single person. Psychological or emotional tension occurring within a single individual, often due to competing desires, moral dilemmas, or incompatible beliefs. It involves one's own thoughts, emotions, values, or competing desires.

Interpersonal: This type of conflict happens between two or more individuals. It happens due to differences in goals value, and styles between two or more people who are required

to interact. As this type of conflict is between individuals, the conflicts can get very personal. It often stems from differing personalities, communication styles, values, or conflicting goals.

Intragroup: Intragroup conflict is conflict within a group or team, where members conflict over goals or procedures. This takes place within a specific group, team, or department. It involves disagreements among multiple members regarding project directions, group goals, or how to divide tasks.

Intergroup: This occurs between two or more different groups. This frequently happens in workplaces or organizations due to competition for resources or differing team priorities conflict between two or more groups. Conflict can also arise between two groups within the same organization, and that also would be considered intergroup conflict.

International Conflict:

These include conflicts between nation states, global and regional competition over natural resources, conflicts in various international organizations over political issues, armed interventions involving significant loss of life, ethnic or religious conflicts, wars for self-determination and or the creation of new nation states.

Sources of Conflict:

There are many sources of conflict. The main sources of conflict are briefly presented below.

Economic conflict: Economic conflict involves competing motives to attain scarce resources. Each party wants to get the most that it can, and the behavior and emotions of each party are directed toward maximizing its gain.

Value Conflict: Value conflict involves incompatibility in ways of life, ideologies, the preferences, principles and practices that people believe in. International conflict (e.g., the Cold War) often has a strong value component, wherein each side asserts the rightness and superiority of its way of life and its political-economic system.

Power Conflict: Power conflict occurs when each party wishes to maintain or maximize the amount of influence that it exerts in the relationship and the social setting. It is impossible for one party to be stronger without the other being weaker, at least in terms of direct influence over each other. Thus, a power struggle ensues which usually ends in a victory and defeat, or in a "stand-off" with a continuing state of tension. Power conflicts can occur between individuals, between groups or between nations, whenever one or both parties choose to take a power approach to the relationship.

Ineffective Communication: Another important source of conflict is ineffective communication. Miscommunication and misunderstanding can create conflict even where there are no basic incompatibilities. In addition, parties may have different perceptions as to what are the facts in a situation, and until they share information and clarify their perceptions, resolution is impossible. Self-centeredness, selective perception, emotional bias, prejudices, etc., are all forces that lead us to perceive situations very differently from the other party.

Most conflicts are not of a pure type, but involve a mixture of sources. The more sources that are involved, the more intense and intractable the conflict usually is.

Consequences of Conflict:

Conflicts have positive as well as negative consequences for the parties involved and for the larger social system of which the disputing parties are members.

Positive Results of Conflict:

On the positive side, conflict can bring opportunity, development, and growth to individuals, groups, and organizations, resulting in increased cohesion and trust. It can lead, as well, to more effective personal and organizational performance.

Negative Results of Conflict:

Often the positive benefits of conflict are overshadowed by harmful consequences that result when disputing parties attempt to achieve their goals at the expense of others. Such forcing exchanges often bring about an escalation of the conflict that is difficult to reverse.

Conflict Resolution:

Conflict resolution is a process of managing a conflict and negotiating a solution. It is best understood as a working model with two key elements, conflict management and negotiation. Conflict Management is a communication process for changing the negative emotional states in a conflict to emotional states that allow working out a solution to the conflict. The process of conflict management is the foundation for more effective conflict resolution. Managing the conflict involves defusing any strong emotion involved in the conflict and enabling the disputing parties to understand their differences and similarities. Negotiation is a communication process for enabling disputing parties to achieve an outcome with respect to their differences. Negotiation involves enabling the parties in the conflict to achieve an outcome with respect to their differences. Conflict management is then directed toward settlement and negotiation is directed toward achieving the more difficult outcome, resolution.

The win or collaborative strategy in conflict requires a special approach to negotiation, interest-based negotiation. Interest-based negotiation is a communication process for developing an integrative agreement that meets the interests of the differing parties. Conflict management, deals with the attitudes and strong negative emotions usually associated with a conflict situation. It involves defusing the accompanying emotional energy and achieving a mutual understanding of differences. This element is often referred to as conflict settlement. Conflict settlement occurs when destructive behavior has been reduced and hostile attitudes lessened. However, the causes of the conflict still remain to be resolved. Once the conflict has been reduced, the next step is to use negotiation or problem solving to arrive at an outcome that satisfies both parties. At this point, the conflict is resolved, that is, the structure of the situation that gave rise to the struggle in the first place is changed and modified so that the interests of all parties are met. The conflict resolution approaches also point out strategies that could be employed to find an exit from the conflict's destroying dynamic and that aim toward achieving satisfying solution for all parties involved.

The object of conflict reduction is to achieve a constructive emotional state where all parties have a clear and mutual understanding of each other's views. If the difference involves beliefs that are intangible, success is achieved when there is a mutual understanding. If the differences are tangible (needs), success is achieved when the parties agree to negotiate and arrive at a mutually satisfying solution.

Working model of Conflict resolution:

The conflict resolution working model is a process comprised of four stages: awareness, self-preparation, conflict reduction, and negotiation.

Awareness:

This is the first stage of the conflict resolution model. It involves coming to awareness of the negative emotional states in a conflict. It emerges around the awareness of perceived differences,

Self-Preparation:

The second stage of the conflict resolution model involves accessing a resourceful state, deciding your outcome and planning the steps to achieve it. This stage can take place quickly or involve a considerable amount of time depending on the context.

Conflict Reduction:

The third stage of the model, conflict reduction, involves reducing the level of emotional energy (diffusing negative emotions) and clarifying to understand the differences. This allows disputing parties to settle the conflict, that is, agree to eliminate destructive behavior as well as negative attitudes and feelings toward each other. This settlement may not be an agreement that resolves all the differences but one that enables the disputing parties to go forward with an understanding of their differences and mutual respect for one another.

Negotiation:

Negotiation is a communication process where each party attempts to influence each other to get what they want or need from each other. Interest based negotiation is a particular form of negotiation where the outcome is to achieve an integrative agreement. An integrative agreement is one in which all the parties get their interests at least partially satisfied. The most critical step in negotiation is identifying and clarifying interests. The process involves the parties using reflective listening to change the negative emotional states in the conflict to states that are more amenable to resolving disputes and differences. The process also allows the parties to clarify misunderstandings and facilitate movement from a focus on the past to a focus on the future.

Conclusion:

Conflict is an inevitable fact of human existence. Conflicts are long lasting aspects of human behavior and social relationships. When two or more individuals, groups, nations states, etc. interact on certain issues there is a possibility of differences in their opinions and clash of interest that results in disagreement which can lead to a conflict. Conflicts have positive as well as negative consequences for the parties involved and for the larger social system of which the disputing parties are members. The occurrence of conflict can be handled with tendencies which are within the reach of the involving parties or their neighboring societies. Parties can use the strategies of conflict resolution and management like self-help approach, negotiation, mediation, intervention, and diplomacy, etc. to limit the conflict from escalation. The process of conflict management is the foundation for more effective conflict resolution. Conflict management is directed toward settlement and negotiation involves enabling the parties in the conflict to achieve an outcome with respect to their differences.

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