Work Groups and Conflict Management

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Groups and Teams

• **A Group** is two or more people who interact with each other to accomplish certain goals or meet certain needs.

• **A Team** is a group whose members work intensely with each other to achieve a specific, common goal or objective.

• There are subtle differences between group and team. However, this Course will not explore these differences.
Synergy

- People working in a group are able to produce more outputs than would have been produced if each person had worked separately

- Benefits of group synergy
  - Ability of group members to bounce ideas off one another
  - To correct one another’s mistakes
  - To bring a diverse knowledge base to bear on a problem
  - To accomplish work that is too vast for any one individual to achieve
Types of Groups

- **Formal Group**: A group that managers establish to achieve organization goals.
- **Informal Group**: A group that managers or non-managerial employees form to help achieve their own goals or to meet their own needs.
- **Virtual Team**: A team whose members rarely meet face-to-face; they interact by using various forms of information technology.
- **Interest Group**: An informal group of employees seeking to achieve a common goal related to their membership in an organization.
Large Groups vs Small Groups

• Large groups
  – More resources at their disposal to achieve group goals
  – Enables managers to obtain division of labour advantages
  – Problem of communication and coordination
  – Lower level of motivation
  – Members might not think their efforts are really needed

• Small groups
  – Interact more with each other and easier to coordinate their efforts
  – More motivated, satisfied, and committed
  – Easier to share information
  – Better able to see the importance of their personal contributions
GROUP COHESIVENESS AND PERFORMANCE
Group Cohesiveness

• The degree of unity of a group when working toward a common goal.
• The tendency of group members to provide mutual support.
• Cohesion has a direct impact of group performance.
• Group cohesion takes time to develop.
Factors Influence Group Cohesiveness and Performance

- **Membership**
  - size of the group
  - compatibility of members
  - permanence of group members

- **Work Environment**
  - nature of the task
  - physical setting
  - communications
  - technology

- **Organisational**
  - management and leadership
  - HR policies and procedures
  - success
  - external threat

- **Group Development and Maturity**
  - forming
  - storming
  - norming
  - performing
  - adjourning
Membership

- Large groups are more difficult to supervise; may be necessary to split into sub-groups. 5-7 people are widely regarded as optimum size.
- More homogeneous membership makes it easier to achieve group cohesion.
- Stable membership and capable members are positive factors.
Work Environment

• It helps if the group task requires members to communicate and interact regularly.
• Close physical proximity, e.g., sharing office, helps group cohesiveness.
• Easy communication helps group cohesiveness.
• Technology is an important underlying factor.
Organisational

- The characteristics of the management and leadership.
- Equitable HR policies and procedures.
- Success likely leads to better cohesions and further successes.
- Common external threats can help members to bond with each other.
Group Development and Maturity

- Group development is a process of several stages, such as Bruce Tuckman’s model.
- The degree of cohesiveness is affected by the stage of a group is at, and by the manner it gets to that stage.
TEAM DEVELOPMENT PROCESS
Stages of Team Development

Proposed by Bruce Tuckman in 1965
Forming

- Team members are introduced and begin getting to know each other
- Goals and tasks are established
- Generally polite behavior among members
- Norms are not understood
Storming

- Members are sizing each other up and may feel more comfortable and voice their views
- Members may compete for team roles
- May argue about goals or how they should be accomplished
- May choose sides against other members
Norming

• Once issues are resolved, agreement occurs around team norms and expectations

• Trust and common interests are developing

• Roles and objectives are clarified and understood
Performing

• Members make contributions and are motivated by results
• Leadership is shared according to members’ knowledge and skills
• Norms and culture are well understood
• Tasks get accomplished effectively and efficiently
Adjourning

- Only applies for temporary teams
- When team objectives are accomplished, the team is disbanded.
DEFINITION OF CONFLICT
What is a Conflict?

• The interaction of interdependent people who perceive incompatible goals and interference from each other in achieving those goals.

• The process in which one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party.
Nature of Organisational Conflict

- Because the goals, preferences, and interest of stakeholder groups differ, conflict is inevitable in organization.
- Some conflict is good for organisation and can improve organisational effectiveness:
  - Can overcome inertia and lead to organisational learning and change.
  - Can improve decision making and allow an organisation to better change and adapt to its environment.
Is Conflict Good or Bad?: Pre 1970s View

- Historically, experts viewed conflict as dysfunctional
- Undermined relations
- Wasted human energy
- Results in job dissatisfaction, turnover, stress, lower productivity, less information sharing
Is Conflict Good or Bad?: 1970s-1990s View

- From 1970s to 1990s, experts believed there is an optimal level of conflict.
- Dysfunctional to have too little and too much conflict.
- Some conflict is good because:
  - Better decisions
  - Reexamine assumptions
  - Improves responsiveness to external environment
  - Increases cohesion within the team
Is Conflict Good or Bad?: Emerging View

- Lack of constructive conflict is bad, but some produces positive outcomes, up to a point
- Relationship conflict is dysfunctional
- Problem: difficult to separate constructive from relationship conflict
  - Drive to defend naturally activated when ideas are critiqued
Constructive vs Relationship Conflicts

• Constructive (task) conflict
  – Conflict is aimed at issue, not parties
  – Produces benefits of conflict
  – Upper limit to any conflict, including constructive

• Relationship (socioemotional) conflict
  – Aims conflict at the person (e.g. their competence), not the task or issue
  – Introduces perceptual biases
  – Distorts information processing
Functional vs Dysfunctional Conflicts

• **Functional conflict**: works toward the goals of an organization or group
  – “Constructive Conflict”--Mary Parker Follett (1925)
  – Increases information and ideas
  – Encourages innovative thinking
  – Unshackles different points of view
  – Reduces stagnation

• **Dysfunctional conflict**: blocks an organization or group from reaching its goals
  – Tension, anxiety, stress
  – Drives out low conflict tolerant people
  – Reduced trust
  – Poor decisions because of withheld or distorted information
  – Excessive management focus on the conflict
Negative Effects of Conflict

- Lack of teamwork
- Escalated competition
- Frustrated arguments
- Poor communication
- Frustration
- Friction
- Hostility and jealousy
- Personal defeat
- Aggression
- Low morale
Positive Effects of Conflict

- People working harder to fight defeat
- Controlled competition
- Healthy arguments
- Innovation and creativity.
Causes of Conflict

- Differences in personality
- Differences in interests and objectives
- Clarity of role
- Poor structure
- Ambiguous contract
- Lack or sharing of resources
- Territory
- Jealousy.
CONFLICT MANAGEMENT
Conflict Management Approaches

- Forcing
- Collaborating
- Compromising
- Avoiding
- Accommodating

Assertive vs. Unassertive

Uncooperative vs. Cooperative

COOPERATIVENESS

ASSERTIVENESS
Forcing

- An attempt to satisfy personal needs at the expense of the other person
- Formal authority, physical threats, manipulation, etc.
- You feel vindicated, but the other party feels defeated
- **When to use:** emergencies, when only one right way exists, prevent others from taking advantage
Avoiding

- Neglects the interests of both parties by sidestepping the conflict or postponing a solution
- Used by managers that are not emotionally able to handle conflict
- Problems don’t get resolved
- **When to use:** small issue, limited time/resources
Compromising

- Intermediate response to assertiveness and cooperativeness
- Tries to bring partial satisfaction for both parties
- Participants seek expedient, not effective, solutions
- Can result in game playing and encourages requests for more than what is needed
- **When to use:** late in conflict, when partial win is better than none for both parties
Accommodating

- Satisfies the other party’s concerns while neglecting your own
- Emphasis on preserving a friendly relationship at expense of appraising issues
- Other person can take advantage of you
- When to use: keeping harmony, using small favour to get larger one
Collaborating

• Attempt to fully address the concerns of both parties
• Does not seek to assign blame
• Solution is satisfactory to both parties
• Problem is likely to be resolved
• **When to use:** for important issues when time is not a problem, where organizational support exists, when win-win solution is possible
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Your Posture</th>
<th>Supporting Rationale</th>
<th>Likely Outcome</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Forcing</td>
<td>Get your way.</td>
<td>“I know what’s right. Don’t question my judgment or authority.”</td>
<td>It is better to risk causing a few hard feelings than to abandon an issue you are committed to.</td>
<td>You feel vindicated, but other party feels defeated and possibly humiliated.</td>
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<td>II. Avoiding</td>
<td>Avoid having to deal with conflict.</td>
<td>“I’m neutral on that issue.” “Let me think about it.” “That’s someone else’s problem”</td>
<td>Disagreements are inherently bad because they create tension.</td>
<td>Interpersonal problems don’t get resolved, causing long-term frustration manifested in a variety of ways.</td>
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<td>III. Compromising</td>
<td>Reach an agreement quickly.</td>
<td>“Let’s search for a solution we can both live with so we can get on with our work.”</td>
<td>Prolonged conflicts distract people from their work and engender bitter feelings.</td>
<td>Participants become conditioned to seek expedient, rather than effective, solutions.</td>
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<td>IV. Accommodating</td>
<td>Don’t upset the other person.</td>
<td>“How can I help you feel good about this encounter?” “My position isn’t so important that it is worth risking bad feeling between us.”</td>
<td>Maintaining harmonious relationships should be our top priority.</td>
<td>Other person is likely to take advantage of you.</td>
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<td>V. Collaborating</td>
<td>Solve the problem together.</td>
<td>“This is my position, what is yours?” “I’m committed to finding the best possible solution.” “What do the facts suggest?”</td>
<td>The positions of both parties are equally important (although not necessarily equally valid). Equal emphasis should be placed on the quality of the outcome and the fairness of the decision-making process.</td>
<td>The problem is most likely to be resolved. Also, both parties are committed to the solution and satisfied that they have been treated fairly.</td>
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Expected Learning Outcomes

- Students should know the main factors influencing group/team cohesiveness and performance;
- Students should know Tuckman’s team development process;
- Students should understand the concept of conflict and the evolving views of the nature and potential impact of conflict;
- Students should know the distinction between constructive (functional) conflicts and relationship (dysfunction) conflicts; as well as the potential benefits of the former and damages of the latter;
- Students should be aware of the common causes for conflicts;
- Students should know the five approaches to conflict management and their suitability; compare them in objective, posture, rationale and possible outcomes.