
UNIT 7 CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

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7.1 INTRODUCTION

Life is a series of interruptions and recoveries. If social life has its conflicts, it also has its adjustments. Individuals quarrel, then make it up. Workers strike, but also negotiate for a settlement. This world is suspended in balance between violence and peace. Sometimes there seems to be hope that conflict will be averted after all; sometimes it looks as if it would start very soon. It is probably true that the greater part of human energy is devoted not to out and out antagonism against opponents but to efforts to get along somehow with them. Conflict is not an incidental or abnormal phase of man's behaviour but is intermittent in human society. Intermittent because for one thing opponents may be very unevenly matched, so that the weaker

despairs of victory and accepts victory rather than the risk of being exterminated altogether.

Conflicts sometimes cease because those who have started them become remorseful and make overtures of good will. This is seen in the case of married couples who quarrel, and then make up. In addition to this factor making for peace which is inherent in either the nature of conflict or the nature of man himself, there is the social or objective factor. Peace is essential to organised social life. Societies evolve means for elimination of conflict, or at least for keeping conflict within bounds.

Aims and Objectives

After studying this Unit, you should be able to understand the

- Sources of Conflict
- Methods of Conflict Management
- Modes of Conflict Management

7.2 ANALYSING ORGANISATIONAL CONFLICT

Three distinct criteria define the role of an administrator in an organisation: planning, resource allocation and conflict management. There is no doubt that managing conflict permeates every aspect of the administrative role. Awareness of the various forms of conflict management that can be employed at different stages of the development of a conflict is vital, if administrators are to organise efforts towards influencing the conflict situation, the parties' attitudes or their behaviour. In addition to that, effective conflict management requires a recognition of the sources that generate a conflict. What, then, are the sources or bases of organisational conflicts?

7.3 SOURCES OF CONFLICT

Organisational conflict appears in a variety of forms and has varying causes. These can generally be separated into several categories. Katz identifies three sources of conflict. These are: (1) structural conflict (conflict arising out of the need to manage the interdependence between different organisational sub-units), (2) role conflict (conflict arising from sets of prescribed behaviour) and (3) resources conflict (conflict stemming from interest groups competing for organisational resources). Robbins identifies three sources of organisational conflict and indicates that an understanding of the source of a conflict improves the probability of effective conflict management. The main factors which serve as sources of conflict are identified as (1) communicational (conflicts arising from misunderstandings etc.), (2) structural (conflicts related to organisational roles), and (3) personal (conflicts stemming from individual differences). Methods of conflict management which are appropriate in one case may not necessarily be appropriate when applied to a conflict generated from another source.

There is also a different perspective which traces the source of organisational conflict to the unit of analysis involved. Units of analysis are the parties to a conflict. They perceive, initiate and sustain a conflict. Their characteristics specify the conditions which affect the course of a conflict and determine the mode of its management. Thus, we have conflicts that originate in the individual person, conflicts that have their basis in the relationship between individuals, and conflicts that occur as a result of interactions between groups. These may be described as (1) intrapersonal conflict, (2) interpersonal conflict, and (3) interdepartmental conflict. Each of these categories raises different questions about the three interrelated components of conflict and each emphasizes different aspects of conflict management.

7.3.1 Intrapersonal Conflict

Intrapersonal conflict is internal to the individual (though its effects can profoundly influence organisational functioning) and is perhaps the most difficult form of conflict to analyse and manage. Intrapersonal conflict is basically a conflict between two incompatible tendencies. It arises when a stimulus evokes two different and incompatible tendencies and the individual is required to discriminate between these tendencies. In such a situation it is common for individuals to experience frustrations and to allow their conflict situation to be expressed in a range of behavioural strategies ranging from apathy and boredom to absenteeism, excessive drinking or destructive behaviour. If such behavioural consequences are to be avoided, then it is essential to diagnose individual perception and utilise some techniques that would reduce anxiety-eliciting stimuli and increase consonance between individual behaviour and organisational requirements.

7.3.2 Interpersonal Conflict

Interpersonal conflict emphasizes the interaction of human factors in an organisation. Here we are concerned with these factors as they appear in a dyadic relationship. We can broadly suggest two classes of factors as conflict sources. These are:

7.3.2.1 Personal

Individuals are not identical, constant or consistent. When two individuals are brought together and kept together, each with his own qualities, needs and skills, a conflict may ensue if their attributes are not meshed together in a coordinated way. Interaction between individuals with different attitudes, values and needs can produce conflict behaviour and affect organisational performance.

7.3.2.2 Functional

Individuals in organisations have roles which are expected sets of behaviour associated with their position. In theory, individuals are not expected to engage in

any discretionary behaviour. Such specification would be consistent with organisational preferences for consistency and predictability. In practice, however, role specifications tend to be ambiguous and incomplete, and in their interaction with others, some individuals often feel dissatisfied with their role or position, or they may feel that their aspirations for higher positions are being frustrated. Interpersonal conflict can be accounted for, to a great extent, in terms of the incumbents' roles and their expectations in particular situations.

7.3.3 Interdepartmental Conflict

The third major cause of organisational conflict is structural. Organisations are designed around product lines, regions or technical specialities. These activities are assigned to departments that often have mutually exclusive structured interests and goals and that interact within a framework of scarce resources and task dependence. When resources are relatively fixed and when one department's gain is at the expense of another, conflict should be expected. If two sub-units in an organisational system have differentiated goals and are functionally interdependent, conditions exist for conflict. Interdependence produces the need for collaboration, but it also presents occasions for conflict.

Other contextual factors which affect the interaction structure between departments and create the conditions for interdepartmental conflict include: different attitudes between line and staff units, organisational size (directly related to level of conflict) and standardisation (inversely related to conflict), physical or communicational barriers between departments, unequal access to authority, rewards or organisational resources and ambiguity or uncertainty in assigning tasks or rewards to different departments.

7.4 CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Ways of managing organisational conflict are as varied as its causes, origins and contexts. The purpose of conflict management, whether undertaken by the parties in conflict or whether involving the intervention of an outside party, is to affect the entire structure of a conflict situation so as to contain the destructive components in the conflict process (e.g. hostility, use of violence) and help the parties possessing incompatible goals to find some solution to their conflict. Effective conflict management succeeds in (1) minimising disruption stemming from the existence of a conflict, and (2) providing a solution that is satisfactory and acceptable.

All organisations, however simple or complex, possess a range of mechanisms or procedures for managing conflict. These are built into the organisational structure and are consciously employed by administrators to influence the course and development of a conflict. The success or effectiveness of such procedures can be gauged by the extent to which they limit conflict behaviour and the extent to which they help to achieve a satisfactory solution.

7.4.1 Managing Intrapersonal Conflict

Intrapersonal conflict is predicated upon an incongruity between individual needs and organisational requirements. Intrapersonal conflict unfolds over time and manifests itself in a complex and multiform range of attitudinal and behavioural consequences. These may vary from psychosomatic consequences (e.g. frustration, emotional instability) to physical consequences (e.g. absenteeism, destructive behaviour). As such consequences are obviously correlated with decreased performance and work-motivation, managing intrapersonal conflict will help the individual to promote his capacity for adaptation and attain equilibrium in his relationship with the organisation.

Personal existence is, inevitably, punctuated by conflicts and other emotionally charged experiences. When a person experiences an inner conflict and feels that he cannot master his situation, or change his environment, a number of methods of conflict management can be employed.

These are conveniently divided into (1) cognitive strategies and (2) behavioural strategies. Cognitive strategies, often called defence mechanisms, help an individual to falsify, distort or deny a particular conflict. Cognitive strategies represent an attempt to control or manage negative and disturbing feelings associated with conflict and to allow an individual to carry on with his normal activities. Cognitive strategies include repression (an attempt to push conflict out of existence), rationalisation (hiding the truth from oneself), fantasy or even denial of reality. Behavioural strategies for coping with intrapersonal conflict include escape, withdrawal and aggression (especially against convenient targets).

These strategies cannot resolve intrapersonal conflict in any permanent way. They can be successful in the short-run. They can help an individual to reduce his level of anxiety and diminish his tension. They can prevent or avoid disruptive behaviour, but they cannot generate a solution. This can come about through the involvement of an expert consultant, acting in an accepting manner and encouraging the individual to evaluate his situation rationally and decide upon more effective responses. Interventions in intrapersonal conflicts entail consideration of substantive issues, discussions and self-observations, helping an individual to unload his burdensome thoughts and reactions and reorienting his thinking towards a more benevolent and self-maintaining pattern of behaviour.

The strength of this approach to conflict management is that it helps an individual to concentrate on his situation and on ways to evaluate alternatives that may have gone unnoticed. The consultant remains detached from an individual, but his intervention, listening, probing, interviewing and explicit confrontation of the conflict issues, sets the basis for self-diagnosis and improved performance. It eliminates distortion and increases self-knowledge. It is a method which seeks not merely an amelioration of the surface symptoms, but a successful change in the situational (e.g. reevaluating a

conflict situation), attitudinal (e.g. reduced anxiety, increased self-esteem) and behavioural (e.g. stimulate productive behaviour) components of a conflict.

Consultants may be internal to an organisation, or they may be introduced by an administrator when circumstances require it. They have several roles to play, all intended to aid a person to be more effective in his organisation. What characterises all these roles is that they are enacted in an informal and flexible fashion and in a facilitative and diagnostic manner. Techniques which are congruent with implementing the consultant's role include (1) facilitative techniques (e.g. facilitating individual exploration and self-observation, giving information, advice, reassurance and encouragement), (2) behavioural modification techniques (e.g. establish, through negative or positive reinforcement, contingencies of behaviour that should be decreased) and (3) cognitive techniques (e.g. learn to undo old values and acquire a new perception of the self).

7.4.2 Managing Interpersonal Conflict

Interpersonal interactions are extraordinarily complex. Individuals are brought together and kept together because of personal attraction or complementary needs. A great deal of individual behaviour takes place in organisations in which they occupy various positions. Such positions are interlocked or interdependent so that the attitudes and behaviour of one individual affect the attitudes and behaviour of another. Indeed, we may describe organisations as networks of repetitive, reciprocal and predictable interactions between individuals.

Although persons in an organisation interact in a relatively consistent way along a stable-cooperative dimension (organisations develop norms to ensure stable interactions), interpersonal conflict is an essential aspect of organisational life. The causes of interpersonal conflict in organisations can be ascribed to personal differences (interaction between dissimilar people maximises conflict potential), perceptual differences (individuals perceive an unfair allocation of organisational resources) and functional differences (conflicts arising from incompatible role requirements). On the whole, interpersonal conflict generates new ideas and work patterns, but when it is augmented by personal distrust, misperception and competition, it can very easily be transformed into destructive and costly behaviour.

Under the prevailing influence of behaviourism, interpersonal conflict management has been directed mainly towards the behavioural components of a conflict situation. Attitudes and perceptions have been considered beyond the realm of conflict management. As a result of this, conflict management has tended to force individuals to choose between fixed and simplified behavioural alternatives, defined in terms of two rigid behavioural goals, winning or losing. The choices and incentives associated with this orientation of victory versus defeat were strongly constrained, forcing individuals into relatively primitive modes of interaction and providing administrators with an untrustworthy vehicle for potential conflict management.

Consultation-based approaches to interpersonal conflict focus on understanding the psychological and operational environment of an individual, utilising behavioural scientists in a supportive-facilitative way and promoting the establishment of problem-solving. Interventions by behavioural consultants may take the form of offering theoretical inputs (e.g. providing individuals with conceptions about conflict), offering content observation (e.g. suggesting various outcome interpretations) and offering process observations (e.g. increasing productive interactions through openness, synchronisation of efforts etc.). They give individuals the freedom, opportunity and motivation to move away from rigid behaviour or from reiterating their positions as prescribed by organisational norms. They address themselves to the attitudinal and behavioural dimensions of interactions and in combining task and socio-emotional activities; they exemplify and help to establish the conditions of problem-solving.

In contrast to other methods of conflict management, the intervention of a behavioural consultant accentuates the positive and highlights commonly held views of the actors. Applications of this approach in the interpersonal sphere rest upon the following assumptions:

1. Deficiencies in perception are the main cause of interpersonal conflict.
2. Barriers to improved information prolong and aggravate a conflict.
3. Inadequate interactions between individuals prevent them from management of their conflict constructively.

Techniques of intervention in interpersonal conflict are closely related to these assumptions and include perceptual, informational and interactional procedures. Perceptual procedures involve (1) identifying conflict issues, (2) defining alternative issues, and (3) "reality-testing". Informational procedures involve (1) clarifying issues, (2) encouraging and gathering information (through interviews, meetings or other instruments), and (3) increasing frequency, openness and accuracy of communication.

Interactional procedures entail (1) regulating the pace of interaction, (2) offering "process" observations to help individuals see how to be more effective, (3) injection inputs in the form of concepts, models or principles which might be useful in understanding a conflict and (4) helping in the design of implementation steps through which conflict resolution would be possible.

Through his interventions, a behavioural consultant becomes the information-gathering instrument and a "resource person". Administrators who are concerned about organisational change and more productive results would be well advised to be aware of the strengths — as well as limitations — of this approach to interpersonal conflict management.

7.4.3 Managing Interdepartmental Conflict

Conflict between departments is a natural consequence of organisational activities. As organisations move towards greater differentiation and complexity, as they change or adapt to new circumstances, the stage is set for incompatibility of goals or competition for scarce resources. The resulting conflict between departments may have ambivalent consequences for an organisation. On the one hand it may have a dysfunctional and counterproductive effect on the organisation, and on the other hand it can be highly functional and stimulate intra-organisational creativity. For conflict to be a vehicle for organisational growth and creativity, there must exist an appropriate method of conflict management between departments. An administrator should know when he is faced with interdepartmental conflict and be informed of the processes for coping with it or resolving it.

Before exploring the methods and techniques for managing interdepartmental conflict, it is pertinent to examine briefly the attitudes and behaviours which characterise interdepartmental conflict. These can be described in terms of the following categories:

1. Effects within each department. When departments are in conflict, individual members tend to bury their differences and display greater loyalty to their department. Departments become more cohesive, more formal in their behaviour and more insistent upon individual conformity and accomplishment of prescribed tasks.
2. Effects between departments. Each department begins to experience perceptual distortions and to develop a strong self-image and a negative stereotype of the other. With the rise of prejudicial attitudes between departments there is an increase in hostility and a decrease in communication. Each department strives to enhance its own image and performance and to downgrade the other's. Under such conditions a conflict becomes a matter of victory or defeat, winning or losing.

The fundamental significance of a win-lose dynamic is that it is, to some degree, intrinsic to any complex and stratified organisation, but that feelings of in-group versus out-group are especially strong in conflict situations. The attitudinal characteristics of such a pattern include a competitive orientation, the evaluative characteristics include antagonistic feelings and the behavioural characteristics include circumscribed interaction and distorted communication. The structural attributes of a conflict relationship must be taken into account in proposing a strategy of conflict management.

Traditional approaches to managing interdepartmental conflict emphasized such methods as (1) conflict avoidance (separating departments by relocating them physically), (2) regulating a conflict by introducing new rules and procedures, (3) seeking a form of "legalistic" solution (by appealing to higher organisational authorities), (3) using departmental representatives to reach a compromise

agreement or (4) seeking mediation or arbitration from an outside body. Such conflict management methods may indeed produce an agreement. They may reduce the level of conflict behaviour between departments and even legitimise new levels of performance. They cannot, though, achieve a genuine conflict resolution because they merely reflect, perpetuate and occasionally aggravate a win-lose pattern of interactions. Separation, withdrawal, institutionalisation, bargaining or legal approaches are essentially forms of a win-lose confrontation. They all start with a polarised, adversary orientation, in which each department tries to attain as much as possible by outsmarting the other. They bury a conflict, ignore it, produce power-based decisions or allow departments to withdraw from it. They do not stimulate a search for conflict resolution.

A range of new approaches to managing interdepartmental conflict may be suggested. These approaches acquire new significance because they become integral parts of an interaction process between departments, because they move away from win-lose type of strategies and because they can meet the need for conflict resolution more effectively. They are best summarised in terms of the social psychologists out of whose experiments these approaches evolved.

Sherif and his associates suggest two broad strategies which are designed to increase cooperation between departments; facilitate mutual communication of needs and minimise the effects of hostility and negative attitudes. Both strategies are broad in their scope. Their target of change is the organisational structure, but changes in individual attitudes and improvement in interpersonal competence may also be involved.

7.4.3.1. Locating a common enemy

When departments are engaged in a conflict, their incentive structure (i.e. conflict of interest) may be changed and a mutual understanding as well as favourable attitudes may be promoted if they perceive a threat from a competing organisation. Shifting the level of interdepartmental conflict to the higher level of inter-organisational conflict will produce a new structural relationship within each organisation, a relationship that would harness departmental efforts and help them to compete more successfully against another organisation.

The perception of an external threat or the identification of a common enemy supersedes any conflict that departments within an organisation may have. As a strategy of conflict management within an organisation, it operates on two levels. First, it affects individual attitudes, perceptions and feelings of trust and distrust. Second, it influences organisational role structure. It transforms interactions which are characterised predominantly by differentiation to accommodative interactions of a collaborative and integrated orientation.

7.4.3.2 Locating a superordinate goal

Superordinate goals are goals which are greatly desired by several departments and can only be achieved by combining the energies and resources of all involved. The introduction of a superordinate goal (e.g. developing a new product-line which would attract great customer demand) will create a cooperative context in which departments may interact on problems of joint interests, develop favourable attitudes and seek to achieve solutions that are mutually satisfactory. The introduction of a superordinate goal converts a conflict between departments to friendly interactions.

The logic of introducing a superordinate goal is related to the very definition of a conflict. If conflict develops from the perception of incompatible goals, then cooperation would be promoted from common goals. To be successful in resolving interdepartmental conflict, a superordinate goal must be of such importance that departments can forget their differences and work together. It must involve several episodes taking into account the time dimension and it must be introduced by a third party. The cumulative efforts of developing cooperative activities are an important determinant of successful conflict management between departments.

Blake and Mouton accept that the most important aspect of a successful conflict management strategy is the attempt to shift the behavioural and attitudinal components of a relationship from a competitive to a cooperative orientation. They do, however, suggest that both the common enemy and the superordinate goal approaches fall short of the need to achieve a genuine conflict resolution. This is because both can be seen as (1) being mainly temporary in character, (2) both are primarily defensive and (3) both strategies may widen a conflict by externalising it.

They offer an approach which emphasizes consultation-based interventions, openness of communication, and greater participation in decision-making and problem-solving interactions.

Blake and Mouton accept that traditional conflict management strategies can only deal with the behavioural component in conflict and bring about a patchwork solution. They suggest an approach to conflict management which involves interventions by organisational consultants (usually applied behavioural scientists), who have no vested interest in the conflict itself, but who have the competence and experience to generate a productive mode of conflict management. They avoid the pitfalls of adjudicating or evaluating which department is "right" or "wrong" (so often the hallmark of traditional conflict management). Nor do they seek to impose a solution. They intervene in order to generate creative thinking and to establish a problem-solving attitude.

7.5 MODES OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Conflict situations are an important aspect of the workplace. A conflict is a situation when the interests, needs, goals or values of involved parties interfere with one another. A conflict is a common phenomenon in the workplace. Different stakeholders may have different priorities; conflicts may involve team members, departments, projects, organisation and client, boss and subordinate, organisation needs vs. personal needs. Often, a conflict is a result of perception. Is conflict a bad thing? Not necessarily. Often, a conflict presents opportunities for improvement. Therefore, it is important to understand (and apply) various conflict resolution techniques.

7.5.1 Forcing

It is also known as *competing*. An individual firmly pursues his or her own concerns despite the resistance of the other person. This may involve pushing one viewpoint at the expense of another or maintaining firm resistance to another person's actions.

Examples of when *forcing* may be appropriate

- In certain situations when all other, less forceful methods, do not work or are ineffective
- When you need to stand up for your own rights, resist aggression and pressure
- When a quick resolution is required and using force is justified (e.g. in a life-threatening situation, to stop an aggression)
- As a last resort to resolve a long-lasting conflict

Possible advantages of *forcing*:

- May provide a quick resolution to a conflict
- Increases self-esteem and draws respect when firm resistance or actions were a response to an aggression or hostility

Some caveats of *forcing*:

- May negatively affect your relationship with the opponent in the long run
- May cause the opponent to react in the same way, even if the opponent did not intend to be forceful originally
- Cannot take advantage of the strong sides of the other side's position
- Taking this approach may require a lot of energy and be exhausting to some individuals

7.5.2 Win-Win (Collaborating)

This is also known as *problem confronting* or *problem solving*. Collaboration involves an attempt to work with the other person to find a win-win solution to the problem in hand - the one that most satisfies the concerns of both parties. The win-win approach sees conflict resolution as an opportunity to come to a mutually beneficial result. It includes identifying the underlying concerns of the opponents and finding an alternative which meets each party's concerns.

Examples of when *collaborating* may be appropriate:

- When consensus and commitment of other parties is important
- In a collaborative environment
- When it is required to address the interests of multiple stakeholders
- When a high level of trust is present
- When a long-term relationship is important
- When you need to work through hard feelings, animosity, etc
- When you do not want to have full responsibility

Possible advantages of *collaborating*:

- Leads to solving the actual problem
- Leads to a win-win outcome
- Reinforces mutual trust and respect
- Builds a foundation for effective collaboration in the future
- Shared responsibility of the outcome
- You earn the reputation of a good negotiator
- For parties involved, the outcome of the conflict resolution is less stressful (however, the process of finding and establishing a win-win solution may be very involved – see the caveats below)

Some caveats of *collaborating*:

- Requires a commitment from all parties to look for a mutually acceptable solution
- May require more effort and more time than some other methods. A win-win solution may not be evident
- For the same reason, collaborating may not be practical when timing is crucial and a quick solution or fast response is required
- Once one or more parties lose their trust in an opponent, the relationship falls back to other methods of conflict resolution. Therefore, all involved parties must continue collaborative efforts to maintain a collaborative relationship

7.5.3 Compromising

Compromising looks for an expedient and mutually acceptable solution which partially satisfies both parties.

Examples of when *compromise* may be appropriate:

- When the goals are moderately important and not worth the use of more assertive or more involving approaches, such as forcing or collaborating
- To reach temporary settlement on complex issues
- To reach expedient solutions on important issues
- As a first step when the involved parties do not know each other well or have not yet developed a high level of mutual trust
- When collaboration or forcing do not work

Possible advantages of *compromise*:

- Faster issue resolution. Compromising may be more practical when time is a factor
- Can provide a temporary solution while still looking for a win-win solution
- Lowers the levels of tension and stress resulting from the conflict

Some caveats of using *compromise*:

- May result in a situation when both parties are not satisfied with the outcome (a lose-lose situation)
- Does not contribute to building trust in the long run
- May require close monitoring and control to ensure the agreements are met

7.5.4 Withdrawing

This is also known as *avoiding*. This is when a person does not pursue her/his own concerns or those of the opponent. He/she does not address the conflict, sidesteps, postpones or simply withdraws.

Examples of when *withdrawing* may be appropriate:

- When the issue is trivial and not worth the effort
- When more important issues are pressing, and you do not have time to deal with it
- In situations where postponing the response is beneficial to you, for example
 - When it is not the right time or place to confront the issue
 - When you need time to think and collect information before you act (e.g. if you are unprepared or taken by surprise)

When you see no chance of getting your concerns met or you would have to put

- forth unreasonable efforts
- When you would have to deal with hostility
- When you are unable to handle the conflict (e.g. if you are too emotionally involved or others can handle it better)

Possible advantages of *withdrawing*:

- When the opponent is forcing / attempts aggression, you may choose to withdraw and postpone your response until you are in a more favourable circumstance for you to push back
- Withdrawing is a low stress approach when the conflict is short
- Gives the ability/time to focus on more important or more urgent issues instead
- Gives you time to better prepare and collect information before you act

Some caveats of *withdrawing*:

- May lead to weakening or losing your position; not acting may be interpreted as an agreement. Using withdrawing strategies without negatively affecting your own position requires certain skill and experience
- When multiple parties are involved, withdrawing may negatively affect your relationship with a party that expects your action

7.5.5 Smoothing

It is also known as *accommodating*. Smoothing is accommodating the concerns of other people first of all, rather than one's own concerns.

Examples of when *smoothing* may be appropriate:

- When it is important to provide a temporary relief from the conflict or buy time until you are in a better position to respond/push back
- When the issue is not as important to you as it is to the other person
- When you accept that you are wrong
- When you have no choice or when continued competition would be detrimental

Possible advantages of *smoothing*:

- In some cases smoothing will help to protect more important interests while giving up on some less important ones
- Gives an opportunity to reassess the situation from a different angle

Some caveats of *smoothing*:

- There is a risk to be abused, i.e. the opponent may constantly try to take advantage of your tendency toward smoothing/accommodating. Therefore it is important to keep the right balance and this requires some skill.
- May negatively affect your confidence in your ability to respond to an aggressive opponent
- It makes it more difficult to transition to a win-win solution in the future
- Some of your supporters may not like your smoothing response and be turned off.

7.6 SUMMARY

Organisations are social entities segmented into hierarchies of departments and individuals. The basic realities of organisational life cannot but stimulate comparisons, competitions and conflicts between departments and individuals. Conflict is an omnipresent feature at each of these organisational levels. Since conflict may have functional as well as dysfunctional consequences, it is essential that administrators explore various methods and techniques of conflict management. Effective conflict management is indispensable if coordinated efforts and productive achievements are to result. The planned intervention by behavioural scientists represents the most effective method since it can produce organisational change and a sense of personal accomplishment.

A wide range of intervention activities may be utilised to deal with conflicts at various organisational levels. Administrators should be able to ascertain the presence of a conflict, its basic sources, the level at which it manifests itself, its degree of intensity and the ways of furthering the objectives of conflict resolution. From a pragmatic viewpoint, administrators should direct their attention to four issues: Is there a conflict? Where is the conflict? Does it require to be managed? How best to implement an effective conflict management strategy?

7.7 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the various sources of conflict.
2. How will you manage the conflicts in your organisations?
3. Discuss the various methods and modes of conflict management

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