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Reading Materials

Dealing With Conflict

Segment 1. Understanding Conflict

I. Naming Conflict (Brain Storming)

Conflict has as many names as the number of forms it appears. Contest, Contradiction, **discrepancy**, **controversy**, **incompatibility**, **incongruity**, inappropriateness, Difference, variation, irregularity, changeability, **disparity**, **deviance**, **inequality**, disproportion, Antagonism, quarrel, duel, hostility, **enmity**, feud...

Some conflicts take Physical forms: Fight, clash, **encounter**, battle, **combat**, violence, belligerence, Contest, struggle, **resist**, race, challenge, **dispute**, strike, demonstration, Morcha, picketing, bargain, war...

Some conflict are vocal; they are called **Verbal Conflict**: Heated discussion, argument, squabbling, debate, disagreement, difference of opinion, duel that invariable take the forms of scolding, shouting, screaming, verbal altercation.

Teasing, Avoidance, Denial / Loss of Identity, Ignominy, Alienation, Discrimination, racism, Casteism (Intentional and unintentional). These are **Emotional** Conflict.

Within an individual/group there can be inner conflicts like: **Dilemma**, quandary, **catch-22**, impasse, predicament, **inconsistency**, incompatibility. These are called **Inner conflict**, and when occur within an individual, called Intra-personal conflicts.

Frustration, Aggression, Aggressive Action: arson, breaking / damaging property.

Exploitation, Discrimination, Murder, Arson, Rape, Segregation, No hold barred Conflict. These are acts that deny the victims their self-esteem, dignity and security. By definition they are **absolute conflicts**.

II. Defining Conflict

Conflict is defined as follows:

We are social being. Society is all about relationship. Friction is an integral nature of relationship.

Conflict therefore is inevitable. This conflict is defined in the following manner.

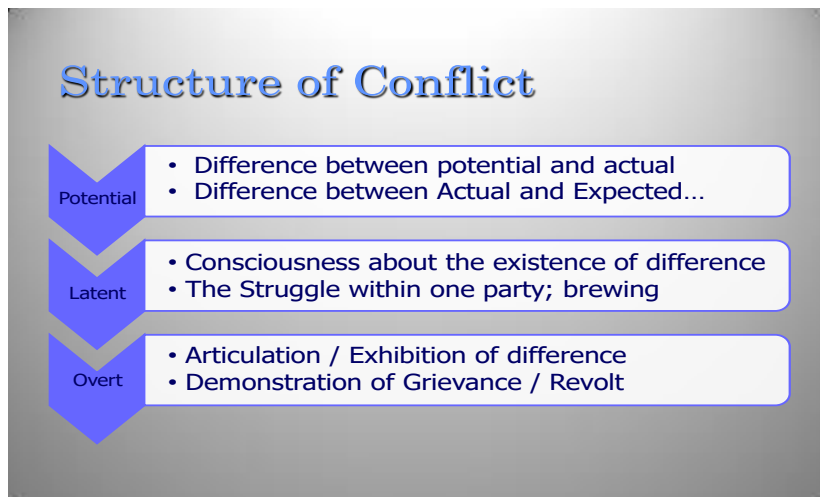
- a) When Dynamic Differences meet, the interaction is conflict.
- b) Conflict is 'Difference between Expected and Actual': eg. Expected employment and actual employment
- c) Conflict is Difference between Potential and Actual : gender discrimination for eg.
- d) Difference between Ideal and Actual.

III. Structure of Conflict

Conflict has a definite structure. Based on the nature of it conflict can be present in three structures. PLO, ABC, and GAI

Structure – I : Conflict Triangle – PLO : Potential, Latent and Overt (manifest).

- A. Potential Conflict: The presence of inherent causes (differences coexist) and the presence is not consciously realized. Example: A self-satisfied slave; a self-contented traditional subjugated wife, a healthy man not realizing the tumor in stomach.
- B. Latent Conflict: The presence of conflict is consciously realized but not articulated / expressed; tension felt by parties without expression. Example: when the traditional wife realizes that she too has Human Rights then her present state of life starts hurting her
- C. Manifest Conflict: The expression of conflict. Example: When the empowered house wife takes her grievance openly



Structure – II: Realistic Conflict and Non-realistic Conflicts.

Realistic Conflict: Conflicts having definite direct cause – for instance, ‘she insulted me; my friend ignored me; the management discriminated some workers, when neighbouring countries provoke us, the conflict we wage is realistic.

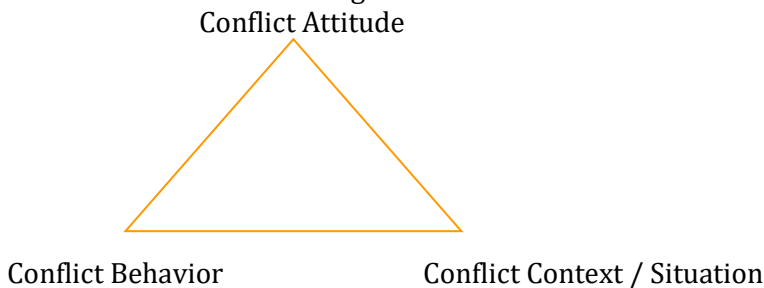
Non-realistic conflicts are those that arise out of no clear, direct causes. A frustrated person fighting with every one; a drunkard fighting with people around; ventilating frustration on unrelated parties...

Structure – III: Functional Conflict and Dysfunctional Conflict

Functional Conflict: Those conflicts which are helpful; useful conflicts – fight for justice, freedom, fight for truth)

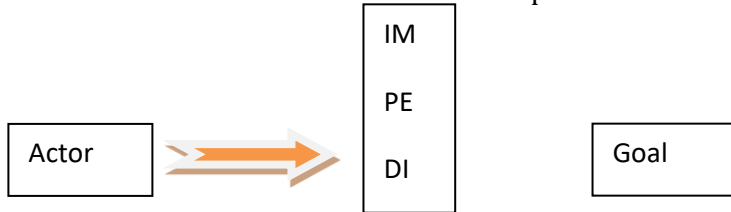
Dysfunctional Conflicts are those conflicts that destroy. Conflict conducted violently between two families end up in loss of relation, death... War for instance is dysfunctional.

Structure – IV: ABC: Conflict Triangle-ABC



Every conflict is determined by the party’s attitude, behavior and the situation / Context s/he lives.

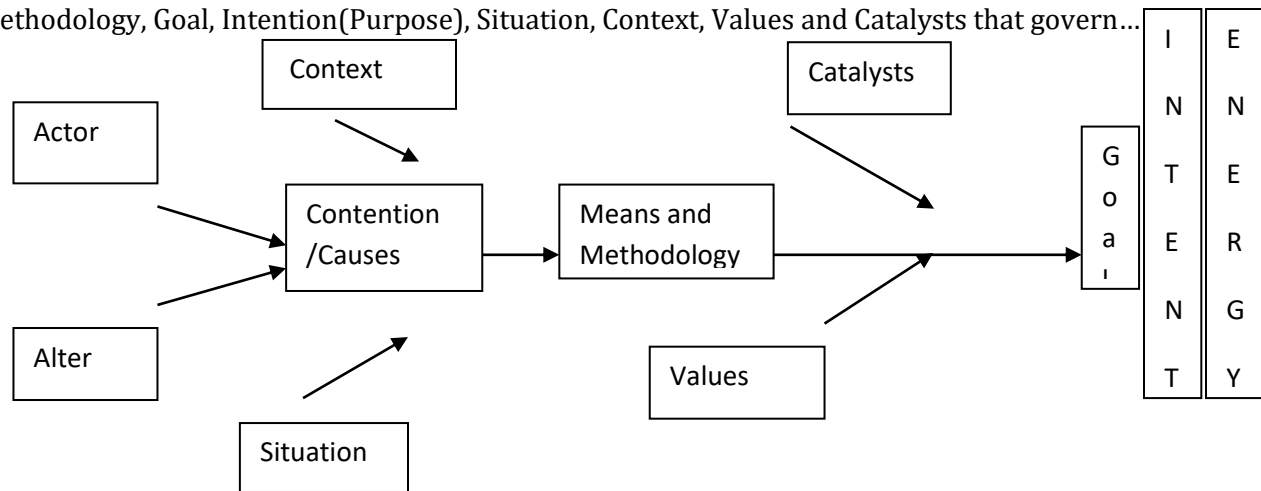
Conflict Structure-3: GAI: Goal Actor Impediment.



The impediment (obstruction / hindrance) to the pursuit of Actor is called a **Frustration**. The Actor's extra effort to remove the obstruction from the path to his/goal is called **Aggression**. Aggression can be physical, mental, emotional, Psychological or all combined in varied degrees.

IV. Factors of conflict

There are Eleven factors that together constitute a conflict. They are: Actor, Alter, Issue, Means, Methodology, Goal, Intention(Purpose), Situation, Context, Values and Catalysts that govern...



Parties to a conflict tend to generalize the conflict and see the other as an issue. But it is only a factor or two that are defective, not the whole personality. If we can pin point the defective factor, the person may find it easy to deal with. (It is like differentiating the disease from the diseased and particularizing the defective part so that treatment can be given to affected part instead of the whole body).

Catalysts: Qualities such as : Prejudice, stereotype, anger, hatred, enmity, selfishness, impoliteness, distrust are some of the catalysts, that augment any conflict that come on the way.

V. Causes-I: Primordial paradox: Humans are torn between two realities:

Reality 1: Human is experienced essentially at the level of individual. **Every individual is unique, different from one another.**

Reality 2: Humans are social being, individual cannot live alone. There is no life except through society. Life is actualized (earned) only through the society. **Humans have to live together.**

Individual while being different from one another, are expected to live together. This inevitably cause friction. This friction is called conflict.

VI. Binary Opposites

Life is co-determined by pairs of opposites. North-south, Day-night, male-female, life and death, going out of house and coming into house, start eating and stop eating, start working and stop working, yes to food and no to food...

Opponents many a times are likely to be on the other side of the binary. Individuals inability to understand / recognize the opposite position leads to conflict.

VII. Non-realistic ventilation

When people are subjected to unperceivable latent conflict there is intense frustration accumulates in mind. Unable to tolerate the person allow it to spill over the neighbour over a slight pretext, some times even with out a cause. Such unprovoked conflicts are mostly nonrealistic ventilations leading to further conflict.

VIII. Conflict Proliferation and Spiral

Conflict when expressed violently is counter productive as violence begets violence. When the Actor starts a conflict with one grievance and if adopts violence, the Alter, instead of seeing the the reason of the actor, most likely to see the violence (means) of the actor and make it a genuine grievance for him/her and initiate a new conflict based on this. Thus the Actor ends up with two grievance. This is how conflict spirals.

IX. Values and Catalysts

Values are those attitudes, behavioral principles and concepts that smoothen the conduct of relationship, for mutual gain. Love, compassion, trust, belief, faith, honesty, forgiveness, help, are values, for, they are valuable characteristics in our reciprocal human relationship.

The cardinal principle, however, is Life. All other values are derivatives of Life. Those which give benefit to life are valuable and those put life in difficulty are not. Positive values help conducting conflict inclusively. Negative values (hate, distrust, enmity, exclusivity...) not only spoil that prospect, but deteriorate conflict into a bitter experience.

Positive catalysts help conduct conflict towards a pro-life end

Negative catalysts lead conflict towards a destructive end

Catalyst -Positive

Fearlessness, Faith in the goodness of the other (human), concern for the opponent, Empathy, Morality, Openness, transparency, Introspection, Confining to conflict points, Readiness to compromise, voluntary initiation of dialogue, Quest for peace, Ability to comprehend the situation,

Catalyst - Negative

Fear, Force, Bad language, Exaggeration, Secrecy, Distrust, Prejudice, Adding new conflict issues, Emotion, Rumour, Tit-for-tat, stereotype, mirror-image, black top illusion ('the people on the opposite quarter are good but their leaders are bad' sought of opinion), Apathy ...

X. Denial, Deprivation or scarcity

Abraham Maslow enlisted needs are fundamental for a human to lead a dignified and complete life. The non-availability, denial or deprivation of these needs is a definite frustration in the pursuit of life. Thus non-availability of these needs becomes a sure cause of conflict.

Frustration Aggression Hypothesis

Impediment to life is called Frustration. Deprivation / denial is perceived as impediments and therefore frustration.

The sight of Frustration creates a series of psycho-somatic reactions. First, frustration activates the hypothalamus, which through pituitary gland activates adrenaline. Adrenaline activates our body organ, particularly the muscles to function faster, the lungs to supply more Oxygen into the blood, and the heart to pump the O₂ carrying blood faster to all over the body. And the person is now hyperactive.

Uncontrolled frustration is likely to degenerate into hatred, anger, enmity and manifest in the form of norm-less vengeance and violence. It may also turn into hopelessness.

A Lion chasing the prey is goaded by aggressive energy = its frustration is the difference between degree of its hunger and rate of (in) accessibility of food (inaccessible but in sight).

The deer fleeing the sight of a tiger is also activated by aggressive energy = the frustration is the difference between the instinct to live and the imminence of death (in sight).

Every challenge in life is a small piece of frustration. More challenging a frustration is, greater the aggressive energy it generates (we experience).

Human gets aggressive at the point of frustration, and can equally be aggressive at the point of 'perceived' frustration. Thus a person can get agitated if s/he perceives a threat from outside, even if there is none actually.

XI. Systemic and Structural inadequacy

Civic amenities and infrastructural requirements have to be sufficiently provided and the members be oriented to the availability, procedures and function of the systems, for the best conduct of system for the best benefit of individual members. Primary infrastructures such as water service, electricity, communication, transportation, education, health, production, market, banking.... Needs to be equitably arranged, people oriented to their function, given soft skill to be part of those systems for reciprocal / symbiotic relationship.

XII. Social Fabric - 2:

Social Fabric analysis reveals that we are integrally connected to one another in the society. Hence, individual welfare is contained in the welfare of all.

As the relationship with fellow beings have grown to the level of organic relations, today, any act of killing or hurting is self-inflicting / suicidal.

As the other person is none other than my own extended self, we have no reason to hate, antagonize or nurture enmity against.

Whereas non-realization of this organic relationship creates high rate of friction with person who are close to us in the organic set up of the society, that is a conflict by itself.

XIII. Social Actualization

Awareness of one being a member of the larger society, necessity for reciprocal . symbiotic life by maintaining organic relationship is essential for life is called social-consciousness. Absence of such consciousness, especially when we lead a complex social life, is a cause of conflict by itself.

A nation which has constituted itself into a democratic republic (every individual in the nation is primary stakeholder, owners of the nation) facilitate a long process of uniform collective enlightenment (consciousness of being a nation in its fullest sense), and enables every one of its member to actualize one's life in the fullest sense. Such development is called social actualization. Absence of a process towards social actualization in a republic is a cause of conflict by itself.

When a nature allows (knowingly or unknowingly) the prevalence of exploitation, discrimination, inequality, injustice among its people, such unhealthy social condition is a definite structural cause of conflict within.